

FLYING ROOFTOPS AND MATCHBOX HOUSES: POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE,
PERFORMATIVE REALITIES, AND THE MATERIALIZATION OF CRISIS IN THE
RECONSTRUCTION OF SOUTHERN HONDURAS AFTER HURRICANE MITCH

By

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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This dissertation examines the process through which the distribution of post-disaster reconstruction assistance can produce conditions of social crisis. The study focuses on the case of Limón de la Cerca, Honduras, a community settled by 904 families from the city of Choluteca, who lost their homes in 1998 during Hurricane Mitch. In the case of this locality, conditions of crisis were synthesized in moments when aid resources were distributed and arranged by institutional actors on the basis of notions of social and economic natures that were not shared or intelligible to disaster survivors. The conditions of crisis that I make reference to in this ethnography include 1) the construction of over 1,000 homes whose dimensions did not suit the logistical, sensory, and aesthetic needs of disaster survivors and which could not withstand the environmental stresses of the reconstruction site, 2) the disintegration of pre-hurricane neighborhood constituencies which provided assistance with childcare, played a significant role in crime prevention, and were of primary importance in creating a sense of place and community for disaster

survivors, and 3) the incompleteness of a community electrification project whose corollary effects (darkness, anonymity) enhanced the capacities of agents like delinquent street gangs, and limited the ability of residents to establish patterns of socialization central to community life.

In addition to investigating the process through which conditions of crisis emerged in the reconstruction of Limón de la Cerca, my research also presents the case of another nearby resettlement community, Marcelino Champagnat. This was a reconstruction site where aid workers, disaster victims and local government officials engaged in the reconstruction encounter with dramatically different results. This comparative case shows how, under different conditions of mobilizing professional knowledge to establish distinctions between aid agency workers and disaster survivors, reconstruction actors were able to create a community that avoided the difficulties present in Limón de la Cerca. These conditions allowed reconstruction actors to engage in a dialectical process of resistance and accommodation to their respective desires and discursive realities that permitted the ontological, relational, and physical transformation of aid resources into arrangements that community residents found intelligible and functional.

CHAPTER 1

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMPLEXITY IN THE RECONSTRUCTION ENCOUNTER

This dissertation is an ethnography of crisis and its aftermath in postdisaster community reconstruction in Limón de la Cerca, Honduras. Limón de la Cerca is a resettlement site populated by 904 families from the southern city of Choluteca whose homes were destroyed during Hurricane Mitch in October of 1998. In the following chapters, I will demonstrate that this crisis and its associated symptoms were the effect of a lack of concordance in the ideas of what constitutes a community, social nature, and the disaster survivor as a subject among assistance agency workers, local government officials, and disaster survivors. These ideas were often aligned with corollary policies and practices that materialized arrangements of people and things that had the cumulative effect of severely constraining the capacity of community residents to navigate the social, political, material, and economic landscape that took form during the reconstruction of this locality.

The difficulties that this ethnography is concerned with manifested at individual, household, and community levels. These complications also took multiple forms including the fragmentation of neighborhood constituencies, the inability of working parents to find adequate child care, the destruction of inadequately constructed homes under the stress of environmental forces, the marginalization of community residents from regional economic activities, the incompletion of a community-wide electrification program, and the proliferation of delinquent street gangs.

Because the difficulties confronted by Limón de la Cerca's residents took form in a space of tension between the multiple ways subjects were conceptualized (communities, victims), body politics were imagined (social, natural and economic natures), and the way these conceptualizations and imaginings were translated into practice (construction of houses, distribution of land parcels, completion of an electrification project) by various actors in the reconstruction encounter, this dissertation is concerned with a focal question: What is the relationship between discourse, practice, human/nonhuman agency, and materiality that precipitated the conditions that inhibited the capacity of Limón de la Cerca residents to carry out those tasks they considered necessary to live in an intelligible locality?

By using the notion of intelligibility I intend to dismiss the separation between meaning and matter, ideology and infrastructure. The difficulties of intelligibility experienced by Limón residents involved processes that limited the capacity of these actors to travel to the town market to sell tortillas or to find a trustworthy neighbor to watch their children just as much as it involved those practices that inhibited their ability to negotiate for different arrangements of reconstruction aid with local government and international aid agency bureaucracies. These difficulties of intelligibility resulted from a disruption of a system of styles of practice, of methods of getting things done, of defining the terms under which dialogues are held, of navigating political spaces, and of creating both conceptual and physical spaces that suited embodied notions of home and community.

The reconstruction encounter, as it unfolded in Limón de la Cerca is a complex object of ethnographic inquiry. This was a process where human and nonhuman agents

like discourses, imaginings of subjects (communities, disaster survivors, homes), aid agency managers, displaced Cholutecans, strong winds, and streetgangs operated in a complex matrix of various forms of politics – of alterity, knowledge, and international assistance. It is for this reason that the reconstruction encounter of Limón must be approached as an irreducible object of ethnographic inquiry.

By irreducible I mean that the materialization of conditions in Limón cannot be explained as the product of a singular agent, be it discourse, economic nature, or a property of disaster survivors. Because no single teleology of failure can be granted status as the linear explanatory model for the conditions of hardship and limited intelligibility I am setting out to problematize, this ethnography is intended to illustrate a number of nodes in the matrix of practice where the above stated agents formed alliances with one another at pivotal moments during the reconstruction of Southern Honduras. These pivotal moments were the instances when decisions were made as to how to delimit what a disaster survivor is, what relations are possible between this subject and reconstruction resources, and what arrangement of such resources is best suited to reconstruct a community after a catastrophic event. It is for this reason that this ethnography emphasizes the intimate and inseparable relationship between semiotics and materiality.

Defining the Crisis and its Aftermath

On page 477 of my *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* (Steinmetz 1998) I find the word “crisis,” which is followed by no less than 6 itemized definitions. The first identifies crisis as a “stage in a sequence of events at which the trend of all future events, especially for better or for worse is determined.” The second definition states: “a condition of instability or danger, as in social, economic, political or

international affairs, leading to a decisive change.” On page 143 of Achille Mbembe’s book *On the Postcolony* (2001), once again, I find this familiar word. This time it is used to describe the condition of limited intelligibility that the postcolonial subject finds itself confronted with as an effect of practices of representation and governmentality that define how it is that reality is to be spoken and thought about, ways that exclude alternative arrangements among people and between people and resources. Mbembe speaks of the crisis in representation as a “form of opaque violence and degree of terror” that “flow from a particular failure: that of the postcolonial subject to exercise freely such possibilities as he or she has, to give him/herself and the environment in which he/she lives a form of reason that would make everyday existence readable, if not give it actual meaning” (Mbembe 2001:143).

I find these usages of the word crisis helpful as I try to come to terms with the social, political, material, and ontological conditions I observed and recorded during my yearlong ethnographic visit to Limón. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 will provide ample evidence that, during the course of this ethnographic study, this community confronted severe conditions of instability and danger. Throughout this time, Limón also witnessed the occurrence of events in reconstruction aid distribution that significantly altered the trend of future events. Moreover, these conditions were an effect of certain operations of power as a system of diffused structures of delimiting objects on the basis of normative ideals and practice that limited the capacity of community residents to “make everyday existence readable, if not give it actual meaning.”

At the same time that I find some of these usages helpful, I also find them constraining. The first definition limits the temporal displacement of crisis by fixing its

meaning as a watershed event, while the third allows for a sense of habitation that is more adequate for my discussion. The first and second definitions also grant the concept potency as an agent that will determine the trend of all future events that it does not deserve. Such a definition denies the agency of the constellation of other actors involved in the reconstruction encounter. The crisis, in this case, is influential of future events, but not determining.

The crisis in disaster reconstruction of Limón de la Cerca manifested in multiple forms throughout the period of this ethnographic study, which lasted from July of 2000 to August of 2001. It is for this reason that, instead of focusing on a singular indicator as the epicenter of this community's predicament, I will approach the condition of crisis as a conglomeration of arrangements of people and assistance resources that were outcomes of the reconstruction encounter. Moreover, these arrangements created unnecessary and avoidable complications and resistances for disaster survivors as they attempted to carry out mundane and essential activities and establish patterns of daily life. The arrangements that I will concentrate on as the principal elements of the crisis in Limón include 1) the construction of over 1,000 homes whose dimensions did not suit the logistical, sensory and aesthetic needs of disaster survivors, houses whose structural design could not withstand the nonhuman agencies at work in this site, and 300 of which remained uninhabited during the period of this ethnography, 2) the disintegration of prehurricane neighborhood constituencies which provided assistance with childcare, played a significant role in crime prevention, and were of primary importance in creating a sense of place and community for disaster survivors, and 3) the incompleteness of a community wide electrification project.

In key instances—like the distribution of land parcels and the design of housing structures—this lack of concordance concerning what it takes to build a community and the practices and relationships between people and things that such an activity requires, drew the multiple actors in the reconstruction of Limón into dialectical processes whose finalization gave way to specific trajectories in assistance programs. These trajectories, in turn, produced outcomes that were considered adequate indicators of successful reconstruction by institutional standards, while many disaster survivors contested their efficacy or logic. The presence of such a disjuncture (between institutional evaluation standards and disaster survivor sentiments) inevitably brings up issues concerning the making of commensurability in assistance projects, the politics of knowledge in technology transfer, and the practices engaged in by the multiple actors in the reconstruction process that either led in paths towards mutually measurable and understandable forms of community reconstruction, or created conditions that limited the capacity of disaster survivors to structure their daily lives in an intelligible and functional fashion.

The lack of commensurability that I am concerned with did not precede the encounter between reconstruction actors, nor was it inherent in the technologies they exchanged. Instead, this condition emerged at multiple locations in moments when specific actors limited the capacity of disaster survivors to actively appropriate and translate assistance resources into realities that were synthetically meaningful and functional. These acts of limitation became possible through allusions to allegedly transcendental narratives about disaster survivors as a particular type of subject and the properties of the nature culture divide. It is for this reason that my ethnographic emphasis

is on the practices, exchanges, collaborations, claims to expertise, and contestations that took place as assistance agency workers, local government officials and disaster survivors came together with the intention of building a resettlement community in Southern Honduras.

In order to discern the processes through which disaster survivors appropriate and translate assistance resources into intelligible realities I will follow the trajectories of three community reconstruction projects (housing construction, electrification, Christmas gift distribution) in Limón. Simultaneously, I will maintain an interest in identifying the actions that limit the capacity of disaster survivors to appropriate and translate resources, as it is in these moments that I view the emergence of critical disjunctures in the way disaster reconstruction is envisioned and put into practice by multiple actors. It is the amalgamation of these disjunctures and incommensurabilities that I will continually refer to as a condition of crisis.

In the chapters that follow I will also claim that the lack of commensurability in reconstruction outcomes in Limón de la Cerca was exacerbated by the making of certain linkages between the politics of knowledge, representation, and community resettlement. These linkages took the form of allusions to allegedly transcendental narratives about the truths of society and nature, like the imagining of the disaster survivor as an alienated, minimal investing, maximizing, rational choice maker, or the invocation of economic exigencies that take precedence over the formulation of locally relevant assistance housing design. These allusions were made at critical moments ranging from the distribution of reconstruction resources and the planning, execution, and evaluation of reconstruction programs. They were also made in various locations like the national

offices of major international assistance agencies, the offices of the local municipality, and the house gardens of disaster survivors. These allusions are important because they assumed the existence of universal orders and ontologies that did not always correspond with the complicated subjectivities, relational networks, and daily practices of Limón residents. Furthermore, they occurred even though their associated practices and material effects were not always fully intelligible or desirable for disaster victims.

The cases of allusion and translation from imagination to practice that concern me became possible, in part, because of their appeal to broader narratives concerning victimhood, expertise, benevolence, and emergencies in the disaster relief world. In some cases, these links manifested as the representation of the disaster victim as a trope of dependency, marginality, delinquency, and self-interest that influenced reconstruction practice in Limón de la Cerca as it referenced a broader aesthetic of international assistance and local systems of social differentiation. These linkages became problematic when their associated practical prescriptions limited the possibilities of both agency workers and survivors to engage in mediational processes that resulted in the formulation of forms of reconstruction that made sense and were functional to all parties involved. In the course of this ethnography, the aesthetics of international assistance surfaced in multiple locations, from the websites of aid agencies, to the budgets of program planners, and the comments of non-governmental organization consultants.

Although the invocation of narratives of transcendence is an important element of my analysis, I find it important to note that discourse, as it manifests in such allusions, did not act on passive bodies in this reconstruction encounter. In this ethnography I intend to show that there were resistances on the part of disaster survivors to policies and

reconstruction trajectories that they found undesirable as much as there was participation on their part in projects whose outcomes they eventually found contestable. Concurrently, disaster survivors were engaged in a paradoxical position of desire in relation to available assistance resources, and, on occasion, were also satisfied with those goods and services they managed to obtain from donor institutions.

An interest in the invocation of narratives of transcendence also requires the consideration of why some narratives and imaginaries resonated more than others among reconstruction actors in charge of making programmatic decisions concerning community resettlement. Such a consideration is necessary to avoid the representation of reconstruction actors as rational choice makers that pick and choose practices from an adiscursive space. For this reason, this ethnography maintains a concern with understanding to what degree reconstruction actors profoundly embody discourses of modernization, development, and commodity desire, and to what degree they resist, translate, and recombine these discourses with other power-knowledge frameworks.

The emergence of crisis in disaster reconstruction in Limón de la Cerca, then, was not necessarily a linear process by which a singular discursive deployment on the part of assistance agencies produced a result that was unwanted by disaster survivors. Instead, it was a collection of multiple encounters and mediations where boundaries between aid agency workers, government officials, and disaster survivors were either strategically blurred or conjured. In these encounters and mediations disaster survivors took an active part in the completion of projects that, at times, limited their ability to read the realities that materialized before them. These disjunctures between the intentions of project coordinators and participants, and project outcomes as experienced from the perspectives

of disaster survivors, were not necessarily unavoidable. Instead, these arose when allusions to narratives of transcendence about the orders of nature or society by project managers and planners limited the ability of beneficiaries to appropriate and translate technologies and disaster assistance into familiar orders.

The listing of specific actors in this reconstruction encounter, from disaster survivors to aid agency workers, may very well seem indicative of a tendency in this ethnography to create clear, if not essentialized, demarcations between the agents at work. It is for this reason that I would like to clarify that it is not my intention to claim that there were precise and fixed distinctions between developers, disaster victims, municipality workers, and aid agency representatives in the reconstruction of Limón de la Cerca. In some cases, municipality workers were also residents of the reconstruction site, while in others, program coordinators were North American experts who resided in the capital city of Tegucigalpa, four hours away by bus. On one occasion, for example, a community resident and municipality worker provided me with documents with the intention of proving that the town mayor was using his influence to withhold aid from the community as a punishment for past political misconduct on the part of its residents, demonstrating that the actors in the reconstruction of Limón had complex interests and formed political constituencies from diverse spaces.

However, despite these fluid boundaries between disaster reconstruction actors, stark divisions were made and bounded entities in the form of tropes and universal subjects were conjured or assumed in the responses made by aid agency workers, municipality officials and community members when responding to ethnographic questions about the challenges confronted in the reconstruction. From an applied

anthropological perspective, these performative utterances became a legitimate focus of study when they manifested themselves in the sequences of logic used to legitimize reconstruction practices that did not seem to result in conditions favorable for community residents. In the chapters that follow I will demonstrate that these were more than mere narrative improvisations that appeared after the fact, but were ingrained elements of systems of practice that materialized realities that were not best suited for those people assigned to live in them.

A central element of my thesis is that crisis is not a given outcome of technology transfer, but that such a condition is precipitated by actions that limit the capacity of populations like disaster survivors to play with the ontology of objects, and to refashion these into relational arrangements that suit their needs and fit with their embodied ways of being. To demonstrate what I mean by the appropriation and translation of technologies and to demonstrate the processes of mediation that these acts require I will also present the case of Marcelino Champagnat, a neighboring reconstruction site, as an example of a resettlement community where discursive allusions did not limit the capacity of assistance agency workers and disaster survivors to fashion mutually understandable forms of mitigation.

In the case of Marcelino Champagnat, resistance to knowledge hierarchizations and claims to expertise did, at times, result in beneficial outcomes for disaster survivors. For instance, the design and construction of housing at this site featured a mediation process composed of resistances and accommodations on the part of community members, their leaders and assistance agency managers. The resistances and accommodations that I write about took place in relation to the dimensions and spatial

distribution of donated houses proposed by an international donor, and the objections that Marcelino residents made to the construction of structures that did not fit their needs and tastes. This process of mutual resistance and accommodation on the part of both managers and community leaders had a beneficial effect as it led to the transformation of a reconstruction program that yielded houses that were comforting and useful to their dwellers.

Simultaneously, there were broad trends at work in Limón de la Cerca that proved highly problematic for many of its 4,000 residents. These broad trends materialized in the form of houses whose design did not correspond with the logistical needs of the daily lives of disaster survivors or the environmental conditions of the region, the disintegration of neighborhood networks that resulted in the proliferation of street gangs and violence, and the continued delay of an electrification project that was funded by two foreign governments.

The case of Limón de la Cerca is particularly interesting because it is a reconstruction site where the absence of national and international aid was not the key element that precipitated a crisis. Material aid could be said to have been sufficient, or even abundant. Instead, the condition of crisis resulted from critical discursive disjunctures and unintelligibilities- begotten in moments when knowledge systems were hierarchized or the politics of truth claims coincided with the politics of reconstruction- that produced a site mired by problems of limited intelligibility.

On the basis of these observations, I would like to invite my reader to reconsider my initial research question by exploding it into two intimately related queries:

1) Given that the crisis of Limón de la Cerca was precipitated by a collection of disjunctures of ideas and practices concerning post-disaster reconstruction, a disjuncture

that resulted in incommensurable project outcomes, by what mechanisms was it that these incommensurabilities were produced?

2) If, following social theories of the subject and identity formation, we are to approach the various actors in the reconstruction process as fragmented entities who emerge experientially and defy attempts to relegate them to a bounded status as homogenous malintended developers or passive disaster survivors, what possibilities does such an approach allow for noting broader patterns that result in the creation of stark differences between reconstruction sites like Limón de la Cerca and neighboring Marcelino Champagnat?

As I hope to demonstrate, the broad patterns of incommensurability that were at the epicenter of this crisis emerged from attempts to fix definitions of reality, and by extension, what matters in disaster reconstruction, in specific ways along particular political fault lines at pivotal moments in the reconstruction process. These acts were more than ephemeral language games, as they were linked to the specific mobilization of resources and people in Cholulteca. The most relevant of these attempts were executed on the basis of truth claims concerning the nature of social and economic systems and disaster victims. Also, these claims did not always translate into policies and practices that yielded disaster mitigation. Whether pertaining to housing design and construction, or the evaluation of reconstruction programs, the ethnographic evidence presented in this dissertation will show that there were multiple discrepancies between the mimetic images produced in institutional reports concerning Limón de la Cerca and the narratives of community residents and program managers regarding the ambiguous successes of key reconstruction projects.

These discrepancies beckon the examination of what is at stake in the invocation of expertise, objectivity, and representation in disaster reconstruction programs. Such an investigation becomes particularly relevant when these claims are accompanied by the utilization of epistemic networks that favor or omit certain forms of evidence in the

making of knowledge about project efficacy; an activity that permits the replication of programs that may be deemed efficacious by specific institutional epistemic standards but may not make sense or seem adequate to disaster survivors.

In the midst of this analysis, truth claims concerning the order of nature, society and environment, or the representation of reconstruction program results become contestable. My contestation of certain representations of community reconstruction in Limón de la Cerca, especially those that heralded the successful completion of this process, is based on the observation of conditions in a locality where programs designed on the basis of institutional objectivity and the envisioning of the disaster survivor as a unitary, alienated, dependent, unqualified, and suspect subject did not produce the mitigation effects desired by community residents, local government officials and program directors alike. Despite these problems in the construction of Limón de la Cerca, the crisis that I write about remained imperceptible in the epistemic networks of assistance institutions as the conditions that gave form to the crisis were either not considered adequate objects of analysis or were carefully omitted in the making of representations.

These critical comments do not necessarily equate with a denial of the location-specific efficacy of scientific methods and practices. What such comments do call for is an anthropology of disaster reconstruction in which the contestation of truth claims concerning what matters in disaster relief is welcomed as a means of making mutually intelligible realities. This is particularly relevant when such contestations are conducive to a transformation of reconstruction practice where disaster survivors can appropriate and translate aid resources and technologies into locally relevant arrangements.

Given that allusions to transcendental narratives about the ultimate realities of disaster relief – those things that matter in the performative sense (Butler 1993)- are no longer tenable as a foundational element in the writing of this ethnography, what are the implications of such observations for anthropological research? What kind of ethnography, in terms of methods, types of evidence, research locations, interpretation, and presentation becomes necessary in order to explore the emergence of crisis in Limón de la Cerca?

The response to this query has important implications for anthropology as a profession. The location of research, for one, ceases to be a circumscribed community, and becomes a collection of spaces ranging from institutional reports, to the households of disaster victims, to the unfolding of events as reconstruction programs are carried out. The voices of interest cease to be strictly those of the disaster survivors, and come to include the performative utterances of reconstruction experts and social scientists, as these too, are deeply involved in the materialization of reality in this reconstruction site.

Concerning the presentation of ethnographic research, a figuration of Limón de la Cerca as a mimetic space that can be inhabited by the reader as part of the process of knowledge dissemination ceases to meet the requirements outlined by the a stated research questions. The focus of this ethnography is not only the minutia of activities disaster victims are involved in - although their mundane activities do become part of the evidence used to explode such figurations in chapters 5 and 6 - but the role that knowledge making practices, evaluations, claims to expertise, claims to representation, and the rhetorical uses of the language of development (participation, integrated solutions, gender and development) and their practical corollaries play in the making of a

reality that unnecessarily challenges the capacity of disaster survivors to create constituencies, build communities, and recover from a catastrophic event.

In the process of exploring these issues, I do not suggest that the collection of theories and practices that are, on occasion, recognized as science are a collection of arbitrary, suspended narratives with no relation to the material world. What comes into question here is the attempt to fix those relationships that scientific research foregrounds between humans and non-humans as ultimate and unique. To do so negates the possibility that epistemes with different genealogies may establish links between such agents, that such links may follow different patterns, that objects may transform ontologically as they travel from one location to another, and that these patterns may include objects that are nonexistent in other epistemic fields. Any one form of scientific knowledge does tell us things about its particularly enacted world, and it does have efficacy, but this efficacy is not unique, it is contingent on an apparatus designed to measure its efficacy, and it does not automatically translate into standardized and guaranteed outcomes outside of this apparatus (Latour 1988, Pickering 1995). Finally, scientific objectivity, like the notion of cultural authenticity, must also be approached as something that is invoked or imagined, rather than something that *is* (Adams 1998) or has been achieved, for this is a condition has yet to be realized. Furthermore, such claims are vested with the power to end dialogues, abort critically important mediations, and influence the materialization of reality in places like Southern Honduras.

Consequently, instead of prioritizing those things that scientific research (like the results of a nutritional study presented in chapter 6) tells us, I am more interested in those things that it does not. That is, the properties of the constitutive outside of its categories

of knowledge and those relationships between objects that scientific methodologies will not allow, like that between discourse, subjects, subjectivities, practices and realities. It is in these interstitial spaces (Bhabha 1994) that people like the residents of Limón de la Cerca live their lives and contest the marginalizing effects of incommensurable reconstruction practices. It is by exploring these spaces that I hope anthropological research can begin to emphasize the relevance of postcolonial and poststructural approaches for the solving of pressing problems.

Flying Rooftops and Matchbox Houses: A Brief Overview

The research questions outlined above are addressed in the following chapters using various types of evidence including narratives collected during ethnographic interviews with community residents, local government officials and aid agency workers, institutional reports, statistical data collected from 230 households in three hurricane-affected areas of Choluteca, and participant observation.

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical issues under consideration in the interpretation of disasters and the implications that dominant paradigms in the field of disaster studies (vulnerability, political ecology) have for the ethnography of community reconstruction. The chapter focuses specifically on the problematic that emerges when theoretical outlooks on disasters rely on separations of nature and culture as objects that, although recognized as mutually constituted, continue to act as agents upon one another. In this chapter, I do not argue that vulnerability and political ecology are not capable of explaining the course through which those processes we call disasters come to be, but I do suggest that they maintain a separation between nature and culture in the form of hybridity that bears, in its performative operations, an uncomfortable similarity to the

ways in which the systems of discourse-practice (colonialism, mercantilism, international development, post-fordian globalization of labor) that enhance the agency of forces like hurricane Mitch have been repeatedly legitimized.

The performative power of these paradigms lies in the legacy of their previous incarnations, which rigidly delimited, and, in some cases, continue to delimit, what it is that objects and subjects *are*. Such is the case of research designs that give priority to positivist measures of that object we call environment over alternative delimitations of relationships between humans and their context.

Recent refinements of vulnerability theory (Bankoff and Hilhorst 2004) have made note of such a problematic, and have called for the development of more flexible analytical resources that consider the possibility of multiple relationships between discourses and materialities. This chapter will propose one such approach, which, by necessity, breaks with ecological tradition (Biersack 1999) by once and for all abandoning nature and culture as part of anthropology's analytical language and proposing the concepts of discursive practice, human/nonhuman agency, resistance and accommodation, and performative realities as a more adequate means of tackling the interpretation of processes like disasters and the reconstruction of Southern Honduras.

The approach to disasters outlined in chapter 2 is not a negation of the catastrophic impacts of the nonhuman agencies (massive flooding, collapsing mountainsides) that were enhanced by a collection of discursive practices over the course of several centuries (colonialism, comparative advantage, liberal and neoliberal reforms, mercantilism, conditional international assistance, structural adjustment, the deployment of postfordian transnational capital) and which were mobilized by a powerful agent

(Hurricane Mitch) in October of 1998. Instead, it is an interruption of various narratives about the potentiality of nature and its separation from culture, the transcendence of economic systems, the benevolence of aid agencies and the neediness of survivors, and the universality of the certain types of beneficiary subjects whose surfacing at critical moments during the reconstruction of Limón de la Cerca limited the capacity of disaster survivors to construct a community on their material, relational and symbolic terms. Additionally, this chapter presents a critical questioning of the powers vested in the delimitation of populations as vulnerable, and the paradoxical ways in which such a delimitation may inhibit reconstruction actors' capacity to alleviate the effects of processes like Mitch.

Chapter 3 introduces the research sites and ethnographic methods used to complete this research. Chapter 4 examines how the surfacing of the above-mentioned narratives of transcendence had the effect of granting some actors precedence in the making of important decisions as to how this community was to be reconstructed and the patterns along which aid was distributed. On the basis of ethnographic evidence, I argue that several of these key decisions were, by and large, not congruent with the ideas that disaster survivors had concerning what it takes and what it means to construct a community. Using this same evidence I argue that the ideas of various actors were a synthesis of the practical and the ontological, whether they were agency workers or disaster survivors. At the same time, I do not argue that all reconstruction practices in this locality were unintelligible or inadequate, but I do suggest that the cumulative effects of those incongruent policies and programs was sufficient to create a context that

challenged the capacity of disaster survivors to make sense of the reality that took shape around them.

Chapter 4 is not solely concerned with the emergence of crisis in disaster reconstruction. This chapter also features the examination of another research locality, Marcelino Champagnat, where the encounter between the various actors in the reconstruction encounter had a dramatically different outcome. In this case, residents from both communities (Limón de la Cerca, Marcelino Champagnat) seemed to agree that this community represented a more suitable example of adequate mitigation. As part of my review of the processes that permitted the manifestation such stark differences between the two communities, I will argue that Marcelino Champagnat was not necessarily the product of a singular, linear and rational master plan for reconstruction, but was the product of a collection of contestations, mediations, and mangling of reconstruction practices whose cumulative effect proved beneficial for many disaster survivors.

Chapter 4 is confronted by a number of conceptual challenges inherent in the writing about crisis situations. First among these is the tendency to write about a crisis as if it were a totalizing condition that acts upon the passive bodies of disaster survivors. Such a representation denies the agency of disaster survivors in the reconstruction and, regardless of specific outcomes, ignores their participation in this process. Despite the crisis that I focus on, people continued to live in Limón de la Cerca during and beyond the period of this ethnographic study. Their lives were also not brought to a dramatic halt by the problematic practices that concern me, nor were they structured solely around the constraints delimited by material conditions that these practices made possible. At the

same time, these constraints and material conditions did add up to a reality that was significantly different to that of neighboring Marcelino Champagnat, that was undesirable to many residents of Limón de la Cerca, and which was not an unavoidable outcome of community reconstruction.

Chapter 4, then, is an attempt to write an ethnography of crisis that is neither totalizing nor depoliticized, that takes the complexities, paradoxes and inconsistencies of human practices, identifications, and knowledge into account, while, at the same time, is capable of making critical statements about the tendencies in reconstruction practices that allowed for the manifestation of notable differences between these two communities.

Second among chapter 4's challenges is the treatment the actors in this ethnography as entities that are either strictly bad developers and experts or strictly good beneficiaries and disaster survivors that operate within singular systems of logic. To approach reconstruction actors in this way simply polarizes both reading audiences and subjects of study, unfairly vilifies institutional players, and ignores the complex and sometimes apparently inconsistent systems of power, knowledge, and practice that these actors operate in. Disaster victims do not easily fit within any strict category, be it premodern, traditional, or essentialized Honduran, and they are also not solely victims as they are organizers, community leaders and in some cases, municipality workers.

At the same time, the epistemic boundary that grants experts, aid agency workers, anthropologists and municipality workers the authority to make decisions concerning reconstruction and that separates them from disaster survivors is one that is conjured, and whose reality lies in the realm of the politics of knowledge rather than an objective access to the truths of the nature culture divide. Despite the fluidity of these actor categories

(developers, aid agency and municipality workers, disaster survivors, community leaders), there were critical moments during the reconstruction of Choluteca in which these categories were foreclosed, and certain actors claimed the capacity to speak, think and make programmatic statements on behalf of others. It was in these moments that the politics of knowledge and representation in community reconstruction became evident, and where the disjunctions in commensurability that I am so concerned with came about.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 address these issues using a wide array of ethnographic methods. Chapter 4 relies primarily on participant observation, interview transcription and field note excerpts, institutional and government reports and documents, and survey data. The chapter follows three processes (home construction, community electrification, the distribution of Christmas gifts by an international NGO) as a means of grounding the context in which these theoretical questions are considered on the basis of empirical ethnographic data. While chapter 4 will follow the trajectories of the making of incommensurability in three assistance projects, chapters 5 and 6 will focus on the mundane activities of Limón de la Cerca residents as a means of enhancing the ethnographic resolution of this study. These activities will include the occupations of community residents, their experiences in dealing with the landscape of the reconstruction community, childcare, and healing.

In chapters 5 and 6 I will also use transcription excerpts from ethnographic interviews to overcome the representation of disaster survivors as actors encased in a singular realm, be that a discursive, traditional, or ideological complex whose logic dictates their every action. This task is an empirically appointed one, and it surfaced from the collection of narratives concerning mundane activities like the healing of

children. In these narratives, Limón residents repeatedly appear as actors who tenaciously appropriate and translate technologies and practices with different histories with the intention of obtaining desired outcomes. I consider this process important because it parallels, in many ways, the reconstruction encounter, but showcases the possibility of the resolution of mediations in a ways other than incommensurability.

In summary, these chapters challenge essentialized notions of the disaster survivor but do not deny the presence of shared knowledge, practices, and relations through which Limón de la Cerca residents create linkages at vital moments, and understand and navigate through their realities. I find the making of these linkages relevant, as they are indicative of the process by which constituencies can be formed in locations like Limón, where institutional players doubted the presence of community, and, when it manifested itself, it was held suspect as it digressed from preconceived notions of what it means to be a disaster victim.

Because this dissertation is partly concerned with the politics of knowledge and discourses of nature and culture in the making of incommensurable reconstruction practices, its implications for the anthropology of disaster reconstruction extend beyond the realm of project facilitation and into the epistemic field of ethnographic knowledge making. Given that postcolonial theorists (Castañeda 2002, Chakrabarty 2000, Mohanty 1991) have problematized the reliance on universal categories -woman, child, household as imagined from a liberal humanist discursive space- that ignore profound ontological differences and performative realities as a means of cross cultural research, one may very well ask what kind of ethnography remains possible? In addition, one may also wonder what space remains for scientific methodologies in a postcolonial anthropology.

Chapter 7 approaches these questions by considering the particular history of this study. Because this ethnography was originally conceived as an inquiry into the long-term effects of disaster and disaster reconstruction on the nutritional status of hurricane affected populations, its analytical approach was rooted in a political ecology perspective. This perspective was supplemented by methods from nutritional epidemiology, which were chosen as a means generating objective measures of the biosocial synthesis (growth measures, nutritional habits and consumption, wealth and educational indicators) of disaster survivors.

As the ethnographic research for this dissertation progressed, it became evident that an analysis of conditions in Limón based on the objects of knowledge of nutritional epidemiology (households, children's bodies, wealth indices, energy consumption ratios) was not engaging the elements that, according to the narratives of reconstruction actors, were at work in the perpetuation of disaster at this site. These elements included knowledge hierarchies, the deployment of universal subjects, claims to expertise and representation, and the ontological fixing of objects in technology transfer.

The disjuncture in the narrative objects of nutritional epidemiology and the stories disaster survivors, community leaders, aid agency workers, and local government officials is worthy of closer investigation because the structures of these various discourses seemed to permit certain relations between words, people and things to materialize in some instances, and not in others. This is the opacity of governmentality that Mbembe (2001) and Brosius (1999) have called attention to. What's more, the assumed universality of scientific methodologies and their added prestige based on quantification and statistical validation seemed more and more problematic as the

analytical sequence of nutritional epidemiology dismissed the consideration of knowledge making, epistemic networks, claims to expertise, representation, and reiterated stories about victims, their saviors and benevolence in the understanding of this crisis in community reconstruction.

Chapter 7 is an investigation into the performative incongruencies between scientific and semiotic methodologies in anthropology. Using the descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate analysis of 230 household nutritional surveys, I set out to elicit a narrative structure of correlation and association between the variables of analysis of nutritional epidemiology. These narrative structures will explain the biological, social and nutritional conditions of Limón de la Cerca, Marcelino Champagnat and the hurricane-affected neighborhoods of Choluteca in terms of specifically delimited objects of knowledge. These objects will include household demographics, caloric nutritional intake, and the anthropometric dimensions of children's bodies. The qualities of these objects of knowledge, and the relationships that are permitted to exist between them in this epistemic framework will then be compared to the narratives presented as an explanation of the crisis in chapters 4 through 6. The questions that drive this comparison are 1) what objects manifest as real in these narratives? 2) What limitations to the solving of crisis situations in disaster reconstruction should be expected if one narrative system is dismissed as anecdotal and weak and the other as objective and strong? 3) On the basis of the discussion of the crisis in Limón de la Cerca, what features do these approaches contain that may help us begin to address issues of commensurability in disaster reconstruction?

Chapter 7, like chapters 4 through 6, is based on the examination of empirical evidence and is concerned with the very real processes by which undesirable conditions take form in a disaster reconstruction site. Given this interest, this dissertation demonstrates the contribution that an interpretive ethnography can make to the engagement of pressing problems. These contributions are reviewed in chapter 7, which summarizes research conclusions and practical recommendations for anthropologists and professionals involved in post-disaster community reconstruction.

I would like to close this introduction by making two important clarifications. As stated earlier, the approach followed in this dissertation does not deny the precarious conditions confronted by many Hondurans during the late 1990's. These conditions, when exposed to an event of the magnitude of Hurricane Mitch, had a catastrophic effect whose many repercussions may continue to be experienced by Central Americans in the years to come. I also do not suggest that the distribution of aid after Hurricane Mitch by international donors and local governments is inherently an undesirable process. Instead, this dissertation is concerned with the broader texts from which these problems are approached, the constraints that their associated trajectories immerse experts, governments and Cholutecans in as they try to alleviate the effects of disaster, and the ways in which these actors engage with one another to produce mutually intelligible or incommensurable results.

CHAPTER 2

SUYAPA'S STORY: THE RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL THEORY TO POSTDISASTER COMMUNITY RECONSTRUCTION

It is a hot and dry day in Limón de la Cerca. Two years have passed since the waters of the Choluteca River forced the 900 families who live in this reconstruction site out of their homes. I am standing in the porch of the community's health center listening to Suyapa Rodriguez, a health promoter and disaster survivor, who is telling me the story of how her family endured the floods brought on by the storm. The workday is winding to a close, but a few women and several children remain inside hoping to see the doctor. In the background a converted school bus revs its engine, honks its horn a few times and begins its slow and bumpy route around the settlement before heading west down the Pan-American Highway toward Choluteca. As it passes, it lifts a cloud of dust that engulfs the small single-room cinderblock houses that dot the arid landscape.

Leaning against the wall, Suyapa ends her sentence saying, "That's what happened to us, but everyone has a story." The story she has just told me contains all the elements of a novel: an unforgiving river, a father who risks his life to guard his family's livelihood, a daring son whose heroism goes unacknowledged, and a strong daughter who struggles to maintain her dignity in the face of adversity. The passing of Hurricane Mitch over Honduras was a calamity that touched the lives of millions of Hondurans. The struggle, however, did not end with the receding of the river's waters. For her family, every day involves a battle to recreate an understandable and viable landscape.

When Mitch came, the Rodriguez's lived in *Pedro Diaz*, a *colonia* (a suburban settlement) of Choluteca located along the banks of the Choluteca River. "My father owned three houses, that was his life's work. The river took it all. The other day he told us 'I am finished, anything you do now is up to you, I have nothing to give you.'" The disaster took more than just houses. Looking at the family and the community, I wonder if it took something less tangible but much more important.

Before the hurricane, Suyapa's family enjoyed a relatively comfortable life. If one wonders what life may have been like before Mitch in *Pedro Diaz*, one can find the answer walking through those *barrios* (urban neighborhoods) that still line the river and which were spared by the hurricane's destruction. Neighborhoods like *Morazán* come to mind, places with winding dirt streets, a mixture of brick and adobe homes, and sidewalks shaded by overhanging fruit trees. These neighborhoods are not a center of affluence, not all families have electrical utilities, and some are extremely poor by local standards while others are well accommodated. Still, any visitor would find it difficult to deny the presence of a bond among families, neighbors, and place. The bonds are not perfect, they are strained by small debts, infidelities, occasional crimes, and unfulfilled promises, but it is difficult to deny the presence of a community.

Morazán and *Pedro Diaz* cannot be romanticized as places that fit a standardized anthropological narrative of idyllic social stability prior to the intervention of a transforming (conquest, colonialism, development) agent. At the same time my conversation with Suyapa leads me to believe that the reconstruction of Limón de la Cerca has produced certain arrangements among community residents, governmental/non-governmental institutions, and aid resources that have enhanced the

agency of a collection of actors (streetgangs, strong winds, seven kilometers of pavement, darkness) in ways that are testing the limits of the Rodriguez's resilience.

The Samaritan's Purse/AID sign that greets visitors to the reconstruction zone bears the spray-painted logo of the *Mara Salvatrucha*, one of several dozen transnational street gangs operating in Honduras. The *Salvatruchas* continually made the front pages of major newspapers in 2000, either through stories detailing the gruesome killings they were credited with, or via the announcement of yet another extrajudicial execution of a *marero* by unspecified paramilitary organizations. The *Mara Salvatrucha*, and their rivals, *La Dieciocho* –named after 18th St. in Los Angeles- are both believed to have originated in California, during the 1980's, where combat experienced Central American refugees of the Cold War formed illegal organizations that were eventually exported back to El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Honduras when their members were deported back to their "home countries" (Andino Mencias 2002). After the hurricane, gang membership in Choluteca rose from less than 50 known *mareros*, to over 500. In the brief year and half that Limón has existed, it has gained a reputation as a *Salvatrucha* stronghold.

The spray painted logo of the *Salvatruchas* is a prelude to the strife that is tearing the social fabric of the community apart. The absence of electricity during the nighttime hours keeps frightened neighbors prisoner in their own homes, afraid to venture into the darkness where robberies and assaults go unaccounted by institutions and are remembered by residents as rumors. Three hundred of 1200 homes constructed by international donors remain vacant, their owners preferring to remain in Choluteca until

public lighting is installed and the *mara* activity diminishes. These homes are slowly being dismantled by residents and outsiders who sell the materials in informal markets.

Since the Hurricane, Suyapa's father seems to have aged at a surprising rate. A man of 45, he appears to be 20 years older. Both of her brothers, one a Green Cross volunteer who collaborated in countless rescues during the acute phase of the disaster, have turned to the *maras* seeking a place to vent their adolescent rage. Melvin, age 19, died only 3 months after this interview, on November 24, at the hands of a *Dieciocho* member during a gang confrontation. He left behind a newborn son and a 17 year-old girlfriend.

As I got to know Suyapa better, one question continued to linger in my mind as she told me, in conversation after conversation, of her brother's imminent self-destruction, her father's loss of hope, and her mother's quiet desperation. The question was why, despite the presence of abundant reconstruction assistance and the collaborative efforts of multiple international assistance agencies and national governmental institutions, Limón de la Cerca was a site mired by multiple social and material problems of community fragmentation, structural and criminal violence, and infrastructural failure? This question not only referred to the catastrophic events of October 1998 but also extended to the ongoing disaster that had emerged from the process of community reconstruction and that continued to relegate Suyapa's family and 903 others to a marginal status in the social landscape of Choluteca.

What follows is an engagement of this question through the application of social theories concerned with the interpretation of power, knowledge, materiality, agency, representation, and semiotics in disaster reconstruction. In this dissertation, I will show

how these theories offer more than just a means for critique of disaster reconstruction practices that result in conditions that inhibit the capacity of disaster survivors to carry out mundane tasks and attribute meaning to the world around them. This analytical framework also offers an alternative means of reconstruction practice that enhances the capacity of aid agencies, governments, and disaster survivors to engage in a form of technology and aid transfer that results in outcomes that are intelligible and functional to the multiple parties involved.

Hurricane Mitch in Numbers

In the second half of the 20th century, over 20 tropical storms and hurricanes swept through the northern coast and interior of Honduras. Despite their high frequency, only two of these storms had notable catastrophic effects, Hurricane Fifi with its 109mph winds in 1974, and Hurricane Mitch with its equally devastating force of 105 mph winds in 1998 (Pineda Portillo et al. 1999). In Central America, a total of 11,505 people lost their lives and 17,331 disappeared during Hurricane Mitch. Honduras suffered the greatest loss of human lives during this storm, with casualty estimates ranging from 5,700 to 7,079 dead and 10,072 reported missing (Pan American Health Organization 1998, Gabinete Especial de la Reconstrucción Nacional de Honduras 1999, Pineda Portillo et al. 1999).

In terms of material losses, Mitch claimed 60% of Honduras' gross national product, 70% of its yearly agricultural production, 150,000 homes (not counting rural areas), and severely affected 1.5 million people (ALFORJA 1999). Of these 1.5 million severely affected Hondurans, those that lost their homes and found themselves forced to

relocate to large temporary housing facilities became known as *damnificados*. The damaged.

Damnificado is a term that evokes a collection of connotations that blend moralistic condemnation with tropes of benevolent donors and grateful and docile beneficiaries, which had powerful implications for the process of disaster reconstruction in Southern Honduras. These implications will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

Vulnerability Theory and Political Ecology: An Introduction to the Anthropology of Disasters

Vulnerability and Political Ecology are two theoretical paradigms that have gained significant eminence in anthropological circles as useful approaches to the understanding of events like Hurricane Mitch. From these perspectives, disasters are conceptualized as prolonged processes that are more social, technological and historical in their properties than simply natural.

In the last two decades, disasters have come to be seen not as unusual acute events that recede with the passing of tropical storms or sudden seismic movements, but as historically profound entities that sometimes precede catastrophic events by hundreds of years, and, in some cases, continue indeterminately into the future (Oliver-Smith 1999). Vulnerability is thought of as being rooted in the everyday relationships between human and non-human actors in a given locality (Lewis 1999), and, therefore, disasters are best described as ordinary rather than extraordinary events. In an effort to guard against the conceptual pitfalls of political economic or environmental determinism, vulnerability calls for an understanding of disasters that stresses the role of mundane social, political, and economic factors in the shaping of interactions between human populations and their environmental setting (Bankoff and Hilhorst 2004, Blaikie et al. 1994) which enhance

the destructive (from an anthropocentric perspective) capacity of agents like hurricanes, volcanic explosions, earthquakes and floods. Gregory Bankoff and Dorothea Hillhorst explain vulnerability in the following way:

Social processes generate unequal exposure to risk by making some people more prone to disaster than others, and these inequalities are largely a function of the power relations operative in every society. Critical to discerning the nature of disasters, then, is an appreciation of the ways in which human systems place people at risk in relation to each other and to their environment – a relationship that can best be understood in terms of an individual's, a household's or a community's *vulnerability*. (Bankoff and Hillhorst 2004:2)

Proponents of vulnerability have conceptualized disasters as a continuum between society and nature, where natural events interact with technological adaptations, social systems, development policies and human conditions such as marginality (or wealth) to produce varied outcomes (Oliver-Smith 2001). Thus, some disasters may have a strong natural and a minimal social component, distributing their effects more or less equally among human populations regardless of class, ethnicity, gender or race. In contrast, other disasters may have a seemingly moderate natural component, but social conditions are such that certain sectors of the affected population find themselves disproportionately harmed. Examples of the latter usually involve the urban or rural poor that live in what disaster experts consider high-risk areas, suffering disproportionate numbers of deaths or material losses in comparison to their better-accommodated counterparts. Furthermore, when these populations, which suffer the brunt of a catastrophic event, are further relegated to a marginal status either because of their newfound categorization as victims or the reiteration of their social standing as members of an ethnic, economic, or gendered class, their process of recuperation is limited by lack of access to social and material

resources. As a consequence, their level of vulnerability is compounded and they face a greater risk of being affected by subsequent disasters (Blaikie et al. 1994).

Vulnerability proponents stipulate that this model is not a simple reduction of all populations to a condition of risk that is inevitably driven by their socio-cultural system. A series of archaeological and historical studies, for example, suggest that Precolumbian populations in the Central American Isthmus and the Andes, for example, developed arrangements between people and resources that successfully managed environmental hazards and demonstrated a precocious ability to recuperate after a catastrophic event (Sheets 1999, Oliver-Smith 1999, Pipperno and Pearsall 1998). Not all discussions of vulnerability, then, are solely concerned with irreparable and disadvantageous human conditions of risk.

In the case of Honduras, vulnerability theory explains Mitch as part of a greater pattern of social organization and geo-political economic relations that have systematically promoted environmental degradation and created stark differences among the national population since the colonial era.

Why Did the Rivers Grow and the Mountains Collapse?

According to conventional historical knowledge about Central America (D'Ans 1996, DeWalt 1998, Jansen 1998, McLeod 1973, Stonich 1993), during the last five hundred years the region that is today known as Honduras has been repeatedly subjected to discourse-practice complexes that have created and further complicated conditions of vulnerability for vast sectors of the country's population. During the early colonial era mining and cattle ranching became the two primary industries of the region (D'Ans 1996, McLeod 1973). In the case of both of these industries, specific relationships between

people and the material settings we call environment were established which continually created conditions that exacerbated the deleterious effects of forces like hurricanes and earthquakes. It could also be said that the practices of mercantilism and the *hacienda* and *econcomienda* systems of the colonial period stipulated certain relations of among people and between people and things in which resources like agricultural land were used in patterns that, over a prolonged period, enhanced certain forms of nonhuman agency that are today seen as highly detrimental to vast sectors of Honduras' population.

The *hacienda* system of the colonial era, for example, granted large areas of highly productive agricultural land to appointees of the Spanish Crown as rewards for their role in the process of conquest, as a return for the purchase of such an appointment, or as an incentive for the colonization of the Americas. *Haciendas* in Honduras were primarily devoted to cattle ranching (D'Ans 1996, McLeod 1973). Leather goods from such cattle farms were primarily sent to Europe for further manufacturing, and perishable products like beef were directed towards central areas of colonization like the *capitania* of Guatemala.

A number of anthropologists (DeWalt 1998, Jansen 1998, Stonich 1993) have argued that such land tenure patterns, which devoted large areas of highly productive agricultural land to practices that were not intended to produce subsistence crops for large populations but produced products for exportation instead, acted as driving mechanisms for a pattern in which small-scale farmers routinely found themselves marginalized into less agriculturally productive lands. Such a process was accompanied by lack of land tenure security, which encouraged agricultural practices that emphasized rapid exploitation over soil conservation. Additionally, from the colonial era to the present,

small-scale farmers in Honduras eventually found themselves utilizing mountainside agricultural fields, which, when combined with practices that did not prioritize soil conservation, resulted in deleterious conditions of soil erosion and the modification of water ways that facilitated avalanches and river flooding during the passing of storms like Hurricane Mitch.

While cattle ranching and the colonial *hacienda* system are not the sole culprits in the transformation of Hurricane Mitch from tropical storm to disaster, they are presented here as illustrative of one of the many consecutive systems of discourse-practice that created conditions that enhanced the destructive capacity of this event and complicated the recovery of those populations that were most affected by it. To this list of consecutive systems we may add the granting of major concessions to international fruit and mining companies during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the promotion of commercial shrimp production in the estuaries of Southern Honduras during the late 20th century. During the 1990s for example, several anthropologists (DeWalt 1998, Stonich 1993, Paolisso et al. 1999) identified the main development trends of the past four decades as a threat to the long-term welfare of the region. In Southern Honduras, the application of economic policies promoting the introduction of non-traditional export crops resulted in increased inequalities in access to agricultural resources, the problematic modification of environments, and the increase of agricultural practices that promoted soil erosion and diminished land productivity (DeWalt 1998).

Associated with the *hacienda* and *ecomienda* systems were the *reducciones* of the 16th century, which had equally important implications for the shaping of human/nonhuman arrangements that enhanced the destructive capacity of Hurricane

Mitch. The term *reducción* refers to a practice by Spanish settlers of enticing (by force, desire, or conversion) Mesoamerican populations to alter their settlement patterns from scattered villages to dense urban settlements. More than flooding rivers and avalanches, the dense urban settlement patterns adjacent to rivers or on mountainsides in urban centers like San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalapa and Choluteca were the primary culprits of population displacements and loss of human lives during the storm. Choluteca, it turns out, was originally founded as a *reducción* (see chapter 3).

The forceful urbanization of indigenous populations in the Central American isthmus was legitimized in colonial discourses on religious, economic, and racist terms. Indians had to be converted and their labor centralized to insure the culmination of the colonial project. Perhaps it is more accurate to state that these three terms (religion, economy, race) were not so easily delimited within such a discourse, as they are more recent purifications of a system of representation that did not recognize differences between the things modernists call ideology, biology, and economy. Of course, the *reducciones* were just the first in a series of population movements and rearrangements of human/nonhuman relations that broke with a pre-Columbian system of practice that was more resilient to events like Mitch (Pipperno and Pearsall 1998, Sheets 1999). These arrangements featured extended lineage societies that maintained low population densities, relied on multicrop horticulture and foraging for subsistence, and demonstrated a capacity to recover from catastrophic events that surpassed that of more politically complex societies in Mesoamerica. It turns out that the savages may have beat the moderns at their own game.

But the urbanization of Central America cannot be solely blamed on 16th century colonialism. To the reducciones we must add state-building discourses that uprooted small scale farmers during the liberal reforms of the late 19th century, the granting of massive concessions to international fruit companies during the early 20th century, and the system of desire internalization for commodity consumption and self fashioning as a modern subject that we have come to know as the development movement.

What is of theoretical interest about these consecutive systems of discourse-practice, be they the *encomienda* system of the colonial era or structural adjustment programs of recent years, is that their implementation was, in every case, legitimized on the premise that they were social reflections of a system of order –sometimes natural, sometimes economic, sometimes divine, sometimes racial, and sometimes a complex weaving of all of the above- that preceded and transcended human culture. The *encomienda* system was legitimized through the notion that there were clear, divinely ordained racial divisions in the 16th century world, and that Spanish *encomenderos* and *hacendados* were charged with the moral imperative to oversee the religious conversion of the New World indigenous population while simultaneously appropriating its agricultural products. Emerging from this system of reasoning, colonial mercantilist systems of production and exchange instituted trade deficits for colonial domains that had severe repercussions for those populations relegated to the lower ranks of colonial hierarchies.

Mercantilism stipulated that colonial domains should be limited to the production of bullion and agricultural primary products which would later undergo manufacturing in Europe for eventual sale as commodities in both colonial domains and colonial centers.

Blending discourses of race and divine imperative with the late 19th century's emerging language of "economic nature", concepts like David Ricardo's comparative advantage only served to perpetuate systems of representation, classification, practice, and resource distribution whose effects are, to this day, lamented by social scientists. From this perspective, the development movement and structural adjustment programs may also be approached as discourse-practice complexes that have been legitimized on the premise that they are expressions of a body politic, a natural order that is (or should be) reflected in social arrangements (Haraway 1991).

These observations pose an important theoretical challenge for anthropologists approaching disasters from a political ecological perspective because they bring to the forefront the nature-culture divide that is central to modern thought (Latour 1993, Oliver-Smith 2001) and which is foundational for the justification and deployment of the systems of discourse-practice that create the conditions of vulnerability that applied anthropologists are so interested in mitigating.

The Great Divide in the Anthropology of Disasters

The nature-culture divide is the epistemological premise that nature and culture are two separate entities that act upon one another. Under such a premise, nature is an element external to culture that is composed of a radically different ontology. It preexists culture, human cognition and language, and, in some cases, plays an important role in their determination (Latour 1993, Butler 1993). The modernist separation of nature and culture also creates the illusion that human societies can act upon a nature that is external to them, to shape it, and even construct it.

One of the major conceptual problems with the modernist nature/culture divide for historians of science (Haraway 1997, Pickering 1995, Shapin and Schaffer 1985,) is that nature, rather than being a fixed and unchanging entity ruled by specific laws and relationships, seems to be a malleable entity whose agency emerges in unexpected ways at the moment of practice and whose properties are contingent on multiple forms of politics (of knowledge, of the body, or race, of gender) that are inextricably involved in the making of scientific facts. For Donna Haraway (1991), then, nature is a collection of texts that have specific genealogies and historicity. As such, nature is constituted through a collection of narrations that become possible and understandable only within discourse-contingent ways of imagining and delimiting those objects and forces that compose the *real* world.

Taking these observations into account, Oliver-Smith (2001) has called for anthropologists involved in vulnerability studies to recognize that disasters are an expression of the coconstitutionality of nature and culture. This means that disasters obfuscate the lines between society (mercantilism, international development etc.) and nature (land degradation, soil erosion, avalanches) in ways that are highly theoretically informative about the paradoxical ways that discourse-practice complexes like colonialism, international development, and modern nation-state building have, on the one hand, claimed to offer an escape from those conditions that allied with Hurricane Mitch to incur massive losses on Central America in the late 1990's, while, on the other, contribute to the creation or exacerbation of such conditions.

At the same time, Oliver-Smith (2001) has noted that social anthropologists must develop theoretical resources to account for the undeniable nonhuman agency of disasters

that manifested itself in the form of swollen rivers and collapsing mountainsides in Honduras during October of 1998. This means that we must develop an analytical framework that simultaneously addresses the emergence of nature as an object that becomes knowable and real only under specific conditions of power-knowledge (Foucault 1970) – what Judith Butler calls performativity - and also makes a concerted effort to address the powerful agency of tropical storms, collapsing mountainsides, and rushing floodwaters.

One of the most pressing challenges to political ecology and vulnerability theory in light of these comments is the coming to terms with the deep-rooted way in which the nature/culture dichotomy predominates its analyses. The following quotations should be a sufficient demonstration of the tendency I wish to address:

By vulnerability we mean the characteristics of a person or group in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a *natural* hazard. It involves a combination of factors that determine the degree to which someone's life and livelihood is put at risk by a discrete and identifiable event in *nature* or in *society*. (Blaikie et al. 1994:9, italics are my emphasis)

Hazards and disasters demonstrate the exosemiotic agency of *nature*, but, on the other hand, it is a nature that is mutually implicated in its construction with society through material practices and ideological discourses. (Oliver-Smith 2001:41, italics are my emphasis)

Nature and environment are two objects that are routinely circulated in both political ecology and vulnerability narratives as an allusion to a system of order that exists beyond semiotics, performativity and discourse. The problem with such usage is that it reifies the idea that there is a singular universal order beyond meaning and human cognition, the *real*, to which all human populations are held subject to and which only certain privileged epistemes have an unhindered access to. This is what Bruno Latour (1993) has called particular relativism. Such reiterations of the idea of a cohesive nature

that acts on the basis of fixed laws and that has a universality that scientific positivism is best suited (but always just beginning) to discover are, in fact, a demonstration of the productive power of discourse.

The reason I dwell on this philosophical issue is because the acknowledgement of nature as a located object of knowledge and the nature/culture dichotomy as a product of modernist epistemology in ecological studies seems to have caused more confusion than shed light on the problem. The confusion I refer to is the reiteration of nature through a claim to reflexivity that has not really yielded a post-great divide anthropology. Instead, such claims have merely hidden the modern dichotomy deeper within convoluted misinterpretations and appropriations of semiotics and foucauldian power. In the 1999 presentation of the new ecologies, Aletta Biersack wrote:

An older ecology reduced culture to nature by explaining particular symbolic and behavioral repertoires as adaptive tools. Here I resist that reduction in the name of a more dialectical understanding of human-nature relations...In this understanding, the environment, because it is transformed by human action, is also posterior to human action, a product rather than a mere condition of events such as the Mt. Kare gold rush. With respect to this dialectic, *nature is indeed an objective, external, lawful physical order*-the kind of reality to which the word environment refers in positivist frameworks-the only possible source of gold, for example. (Biersack 1999:71; italics are my emphasis)

A dialectical approach to human-nature relations will always render symbolic and material approaches complementary rather than competing within an overarching anthropology of nature focused on human-nature relations. (Biersack 1999:71)

For Biersack (1999), environment is a space that is produced through human practices that are carried out on a prediscursive nature. This is an assessment that I can only partially agree with, as it is an incomplete application of the observation that nature and culture are coconstituted products of modern epistemology. Nature, just as much as environment, is a discursive product that has real effects, and, for this reason, is

incorrectly credited as prediscursive. As such, nature is not a readily evident delimitation of that which is external to the human and the cultural. The delimitation of objects as belonging to nature, environment, culture, and society must be learned, and the collectives that are included within each of these categorizations are not universally replicated. It is for this reason, then, that society and nature do not exist prior to discourse. Society and nature are ontological objects of the modern human imagination, and nothing else. This statement is not a denial of materiality, the reality of nonhuman agency, and the very tangible effects of discourse-practice complexes (Biersack's environment), nor is it a claim that quasi-subjects like Hurricane Mitch are merely constructed. Quasi-subjects like Mitch, instead, emerge at the intersection of discourse, the politics of knowledge, the resistance of nonhuman agency, and the intentionality of scientific researchers. As such, it is a collective which modernist epistemologies then attempt to purify into natural and social components.

Part of my unease with the new ecologies is the convenient exchange of performativity for an emphasis on practice as something that is located predominantly in the world of fetishes and not something that is steeped in systems of representation that delimit and invest bodies with politics and ontologies (Foucault 1970, 1975). In the above quotation Biersack refers to nature as the only possible source of gold. In such a statement, Biersack fails to consider that gold is never simply *just gold*, in the same way that genes are never simply *just genes* (Haraway 1997), human organs *just organs* (Lock 2002), fetuses *just fetuses* (Balsamo 1996), or air pumps *just air pumps* (Shapin and Schaffer 1985).

Gold, as Biersack refers to it, is a product of a system of representation and desire that has given precedence to a collection of geophysical stipulations as a delimitation of what this object *is* that is in no way readily evident or independent of human practice, politics, and the history of knowledge. Geologists must set out to discover the elementary composition of gold in order to discover it. This search requires the creation, calibration, and application of laboratories, mass spectrometers and a collection of other technologies. This is an epistemic network, a theatre of proof that is by no means universal or apolitical, but only exists within the sinuous net that must be painstakingly created, fought for, and maintained (Latour 1993).

The desirability of this object in terms of transnational capital is also not simply given. Its institution has required the production of a global network of desire that dates to the 15th century, and which has been translated or synthesized with previous systems of exchange, representation, and value. What Mesoamerican anthropologist does not remember the stories told in grade school classrooms about the exchanges of gold for glass beads among colonial Spanish explorers, Maya, and Aztec populations? Among the Maya, for example, the blue-green coloration of European beads was the sign that represented value, not the geophysical properties of the object. This was the sign of those properties we have translated as fertility and renewal. These properties were not a construction, a simple veneer over a *real* object. They were the properties that constituted the object.

The stone we call jade was one object that possessed such coloration in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, but it was not the only one. It is of no surprise then, that a collection of objects bearing a similar coloration were treated with the outmost care and

employed in the fashioning of ritual objects. Did the Spaniards fool the Indians? Did the geophysical properties of glass beads *matter* to the natives? Gold is not just gold and glass is not just glass, they become so in a matrix of representation and power-knowledge that delimits what the object *is*, infuses it with value, and creates desires.

To be fair, I must note that Oliver-Smith's (2001) noting of the exosemiotic agency of nature is accompanied by a more sophisticated approach to disasters and vulnerability that takes into account the coconstitutionality of the nature/culture split. It is in this same volume, after all, that, following Harvey (1996), he calls for an understanding of the historicity of both the concept of nature as a gendered metaphor of domination and subjugation by human actors, and the implications that this historicity may have for how anthropologists define and approach disasters.

With a similar intent of understanding the political implications of the genealogies of concepts like nature, Gregory Bankoff (1999, 2004) has called attention to the history of vulnerability as a discursive device mobilized by colonial powers and the development movement to brand broad areas of the world as unsafe, underdeveloped, and in need of intervention and technocratic management. Bankoff and Escobar (1995) have also indicated that conditions of underdevelopment and marginality are, in many cases, effects of policies associated with colonialism, comparative advantage, the potentiality of the tropics and "third world" labor, making disasters like Hurricane Mitch the effect of a promiscuous endogeneity between discourses of vulnerability and development.

The conditions of underdevelopment and marginality that Bankoff (2004) and Escobar (1995) refer to are discursive effects of vulnerability, topicality (the notion that the tropics are an inherently dangerous place, laden with productive potentiality that is

unexploited by its native residents and in dire need of colonial management) and development in at least two interconnected ways. The first is the performative, the act of delimiting areas of the world that do not share a desire for conspicuous commodity consumption as poor, or the mapping of areas whose potentiality for the production of commodities as unexploited and in rightful need of development. The second is the material effect of these discourses (structural adjustment, comparative advantage, mercantilism, globalization, the new world order) that have actively limited the capacity of certain populations in places like Honduras to access resources (land, loans, technologies) (DeWalt 1998, Jansen 1998) or has denied the legitimacy of the relationships they enjoy with these objects (communal lands, intellectual property, government subsidies). These material effects have incorporated such populations into expanding transnational commodity, technology, and knowledge networks with an uneven hand, emulating the paradoxical condition of the postcolonial subject as a citizen-savage (Anderson 1996).

The relationship between vulnerability and development discourse is nowhere more evident than in one of the approach's foundational texts, Frederick Cuny's *Disasters and Development* (1983):

A natural disaster can happen anywhere, but for a combination of reasons-political as well as geographic-most large-scale disasters occur in the region between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. This region encompasses most of the poorer developing nations, which we call the Third World. (Cuny 1983:3)

For a society to develop, many obstacles must be overcome, and it is important that each be examined thoroughly in its own right. In this way, basic problems can be identified and alternatives reviewed. This is important in the field of disasters, for even if all players have the best of intentions, current practice complicates-not complements-development. (Cuny 1983:7)

Although leading vulnerability theorists (Bankoff and Hilhorst 2004, Oliver-Smith 2001) no longer prescribe the notion of linear development as the panacea for the conditions that bring about disasters, such positions are still articulated by social scientists working in this field (Cardona 2004, Lewis 1999). Furthermore, while the teleology of modernization and development may be gone from academic understandings of disasters, the objects of modernity (nature, things in themselves, culture, market, beneficiary, the vulnerable victim) still surface in problematic ways as we attempt to grapple with the legacy of the nature/culture split in ecological, environmental and disaster studies. Most importantly, as I will demonstrate in chapter 4, these objects continue to circulate in the practice of disaster reconstruction with astonishing vigor, even with their teleological framework removed.

In a recent publication Gregory Bankoff and Dorothea Hilhorst have indicated that “attempts to control the environment [development] need to be replaced by approaches that emphasize ways of dealing with unexpected events and that stress flexibility, adaptability, resilience and capacity” (2004:4). The point that I wish to make, however, is not that Cuny’s notions of progress remain the sole party line of vulnerability theory advocates (although this stance still surfaces at critical moments and in surprising ways), but that the paradigm has certain deeply rooted assumptions about the nature-culture divide, tropicality, surveillance, development, liberal humanist benevolence, and colonialist population management that we must continue to address. The case of Limón de la Cerca will show that these are relevant and pressing concerns, as the

manifestation of these assumptions had dire consequences for the *damnificados* of Southern Honduras.

The need to continue engaging this dilemma, especially when considering the process of technology and aid transfer during disaster recovery, is founded on the ethnographic information presented in this dissertation which reveals that practitioners are still confronting many of the above named challenges. Moreover, I do not see these comments as being an antagonistic critique of vulnerability theory, but as an earnest response to Bankoff and Hilhorst's (2004) call to develop analytical strategies that are both aware of the coconstitutionality of nature and culture, the colonialist legacy of vulnerability theory, and that "stress flexibility, adaptability, resilience and capacity." Such an analytical strategy will be presented in the remainder of this chapter.

It is for these reasons that I feel that there remains an unresolved theoretical conflict that I find worthy of addressing: if nature and culture are mutually constituted, how are we to address that which Oliver-Smith calls the exosemiotic agency of nature? If nature and culture are mutually constituted, does this mean that the exosemiotic agency of nature is singular and therefore a presdiscursive system of order or multiple and contingent on the aforementioned coconstitutionality? Following the coconstitutionality rationale, we must accept the latter, meaning that the exosemiotic agency of nature will take a different form from one location to the next as an effect of the mediational interaction of what Oliver-Smith calls ideological discourses and material practices. Such a statement is contrary to Biersack's definition of nature. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I will choose to dismiss the boundary between matter and

discourse, practice and ideology, nature and culture by referring to this mediational complex in terms of discursive practice, performative objects, and human/nonhuman agency.

Having said all this, I still maintain a certain discomfort with the continued use of the concept of nature, especially in reference to its exosemiotic agency, even if contingent on a coconstitutionality with culture. For the above-stated reasons, I consider the continued use of the term as a vestige of a binary opposition that we must now blur beyond the semblance of a mere hybridity as the notion of the hybrid maintains the separation of nature and culture under the premise that they are mixed but still recognizably separate. The reason that I dwell on the persistent reappearance of nature lies in the power of the concept, a power that manifested multiple times in the reconstruction of Limón de la Cerca and in the design and execution of this ethnographic study. Nature and culture are ontologies that are invoked, performative delimitations that are imagined, not independent agents that can act dialectically in relation to one another as Biersack (1999) has suggested.

Although Oliver-Smith has something in mind other than the notion of a singular prediscursive system of order that is then interpreted and acted upon through cultural explanations (particular relativism and social constructivism) when he uses the term nature, it is my impression that the term is laden with such an excess of connotations, histories, meanings and imaginings (which Oliver-Smith makes detailed note of) that it cannot continue as an effective element in the analytical language of the anthropology of catastrophes. For nature inevitably conjures those pesky notions of body politic (Haraway

1991) and transcendental representation (Foucault 1970) that repeatedly transformed reconstruction practice into crisis in Limón de la Cerca.

So, if speaking about nature in political ecology and vulnerability amounts to the reiterative life of those body politics that have, in an endogenous way, sustained the rationale for the institution of those systems of structural practice (cattle ranching, fruit company concessions, structural adjustment programs, comparative advantage) that enhance the agency of forces like Hurricane Mitch and infringe on the capacity of millions of people in Honduras to live life in a way that they find intelligible and functional, what alternatives remain for social scientists to address, investigate and mitigate the flooding waters of the Choluteca River and the collapsing mountainsides of Tegucigalpa?

Historians of science Andrew Pickering (1995) and Bruno Latour (1993) have made interesting breakthroughs in developing such an analytical structure in their discussions of human and non-human agency. Pickering, for example, views the work of scientists in the laboratory as an interaction between discourse (what kinds of questions are possible?) human intentionality (what kind of knowledge or what kind of machine the scientist wants to produce?), human agency (what is the scientist actually capable of doing?), and nonhuman agency (how do nonhuman objects respond to human agency, do they do what the scientist intended to do or do they resist the scientists intentions?).

In Pickering's paradigm resistance is an element of agency, but it is not necessarily a conscious property. Non human "things", then, can resist the intentions of humans simply by not behaving in those ways humans want them to. Cars do not always start when we want them to, air pumps do not produce perfect vaccums, mountainsides

wash away after 72 hours of constant rainfall in Tegucigalpa, and the sealing rings on the propulsion rockets of space shuttles fail with catastrophic consequences.

Speaking in terms of different forms of agency has helped Pickering address questions about the relationship between scientific knowledge and the notion of that totality called nature. This is what he calls the question of the realism of science, the relationship of scientific knowledge to the world at large. By speaking of agency, Pickering has eloquently avoided the tendency to speak of nature as a knowable whole that precedes discourse and practice. At the same time, Pickering gives credit to the collection of practices and technologies that are on occasion referred to as science as being more than a superficial ideology or construction, and, like Latour (1999) recognizes their capacity to *do* things, and, more importantly, to make things do things. Hence the space shuttle can enter orbit and cars can start (most of the time) when we turn ignition keys. What I vulgarly call “making things do things”, Pickering calls the harnessing of nonhuman agency by scientists. This harnessing of nonhuman agency, however, does not happen so easily in laboratory settings, and the experimental designs and machinery of scientists is constantly mangled, or transformed, in the attempts to carry out their experimental objectives.

Pickering’s approach provides an interesting route for the exploration of why practices like international development, and, in the case of this ethnography, disaster reconstruction programs, do not always work in the ways they are intended to. Popular imaginings of science consider scientific knowledge and technologies as universally applicable. This notion of the applicability of “out of the box” technology is present in Frederick Cuny’s illustration “Flood plain management” (Figure 2-2). But the

experiences of anthropologists working with questions of technology transfer (Crewe and Harrison 1998, Maskrey 1995) prove differently. Technologies often do not work as expected, especially when they travel to locations outside of the carefully controlled epistemic networks within which they were designed (Latour 1988). Furthermore, the possibility of universal efficacy becomes more and more complicated when human actors, with their differing ontologies, relational matrices, subjectivities, imaginaries, and desires, enter the picture.

As technologies travel they meet unexpected resistances in the form of human and nonhuman agencies which were not originally accounted for in developmental or experimental designs -which are themselves, often difficult to replicate in their exactitude (Pickering 1995)- and the ways in which they are intended to work may not suit the needs nor fulfill the desires of the people that obtain or receive them. For such technologies to do so, they must be transformed, mangled like the experimental designs and machinery of Pickering's scientists. Under such conditions of transformation, however, technologies cease to be those objects that aid agency workers or development planners intended them to be, raising anxieties about their capacity to determine project outcomes.

As I will show in chapter 5, this applies to disaster reconstruction as well. In the case of Limón de la Cerca, technologies did not work out of the box. Instead, they needed mangling in order to be functional and intelligible for disaster survivors. Incidentally, this mangling did not only refer to superficial properties of resemblance but also to their ontological and relational qualities. As this ethnography will show, objects like houses, disaster survivors, and communities are not "just things in themselves," alienated and

fetishized. Instead, they exist performatively (semiotically and materially) in relation to other objects and people in heterogeneous and ever fluctuating discursive matrices.

After the Hurricane

But what is the relevance of this discussion of the nature culture divide in political ecology and vulnerability to the daily lives of the residents of Limón de la Cerca? What is the applicability of this philosophical exegesis to the pressing conditions faced by the 4,000 people who lost their homes in October of 1998 to the waters of the Choluteca River and found themselves confronting dire conditions of opacity, scarcity, incommensurability, and marginalization three years later in the midst of the reconstruction of Southern Honduras? In the next three chapters I will show that the conditions confronted by Suyapa and her neighbors in 2000 and 2001 emerged not from an absence of reconstruction assistance resources but from the finalization of mediational interactions concerned with decisions as to how to proceed in the distribution of assistance and community reconstruction between aid agency workers, local government officials, reconstruction program designers and disaster survivors that were, in a cumulative fashion, disadvantageous for the *damnificados* of Choluteca.

In the chapters that follow I will also show that, in key instances, the finalization of these mediational interactions was either influenced by or founded on appeals to what some reconstruction actors claimed, implied, or assumed were transcendental properties of universal subjects (communities, people) and body politics (economic nature, social organization). These body politics, these supposed social reflections of natural orders, took the form of institutional organizational structures and practices (as in the case of USAID's handling of post Mitch housing construction, Samaritan's purse housing

reconstruction program, the Cholultecan Municipality land distribution scheme) whose maintenance and completion took precedence over disaster survivor ontologies, subjectivities, and desires in project design, implementation and evaluation. These hierarchizations of knowledge took place on the basis that the former were the most efficacious and logical means of conducting disaster reconstruction. They also took the form of economic “realities” (also AID’s post Mitch housing) of cost benefit analysis that upheld the notion that disaster survivors were alienated, maximizing, minimally investing subjects that were best benefited by independently distributed minimal aid packages which they would then transform into integrated communities.

The merit and analytical challenge of this dissertation does not lie in the determination that in July of 2001 Limón de la Cerca was the site of a crisis in postdisaster reconstruction. For those who were involved in the reconstruction of this community, whether as anthropologists, residents, program managers, or local government officials, determining whether or not Limón was a community in trouble at the time of this ethnography was not a subject to be debated. AID’s national chief of housing, for example, referred to Limón as a “social timebomb” (fieldnotes 2001), while Cholulteca residents saw the community as a den of thieves and delinquents, their former neighbors transformed by the magic wand of alterity that the condition of victimhood seemed to wave with much license at the time of this ethnography. For those who were not present in Cholulteca in 2001, chapters 4 and 5 should present ample evidence of the conditions I wish to address.

The analytical challenge of this study, in turn, lies in understanding why, despite this awareness on the part of multiple actors that the reconstruction of Limón de la Cerca

was not yielding desired forms of community wellness, the practices of program design, implementation and evaluation that were at the locus of this failure not only remained unaddressed, but were reiterated, defended, and rescued through project evaluations whose narrowly defined criteria of project success ignored the all too real conditions of life in this community.

The theoretical resources necessary to tackle this question lie outside realm of topics customarily addressed in political ecology and vulnerability. First among these resources is the reconsideration of the anthropological theory of disaster reconstruction in light of the paradoxes that are made evident by thinking critically about the nature culture split, what Latour (1993) calls the Great Divide. As this discussion has demonstrated, the notion that there are natural orders that operate on internal logics irrespective of human cognition and which must be emulated by society does more harm than good both in terms of creating conditions of vulnerability (the justification colonialist discourses of mercantilism and comparative advantage, current discourses of structural adjustment and the conditionality of foreign aid, DeWalt 1998) and in the perpetuation of disaster through the process of reconstruction (the case of Limón de la Cerca where inadequate practices of technology and assistance transfer were sustained as an attempt to emulate multiple forms of allegedly natural orders).

But being left without social, economic and natural natures to ground ourselves as a point of analytical departure does not mean that a post Great Divide anthropology disdainfully considers all objects of social science inquiry as being limited to a compartmentalized realm of language – the “just discourse” of those who do not acknowledge the connection between semiotics and those bodies and objects that are

deemed possible – or superficial ideology. This is what those speaking in modernist terms would refer to as the ethically questionable ignoring of the *very real* plight of disaster survivors for the sake of considering lofty issues of mere theoretical concern (note the blatant and strategic separation between theory, practice, and method which can only become real in the act of its reiteration). Instead, the transition from the acceptance of nature/s as a readily evident relational framework that social systems should or do emulate (the normal distribution, rational choice, free markets), to the turning of such nature/s into a primary object of analysis brings us closer to examining the life of places like Limón, those things that are actually at stake in disaster reconstruction, those issues whose discussion in the anthropological literature disaster survivors actually find of relevance to the improvement of the reconstruction of their communities, their very tangible and troubling realities if you will.

Writing about nature/s as a mutable, historically and politically contingent object of anthropological inquiry does not equate with the affirmation that nothing of substance was occurring in Limón in 2000 and 2001. On the contrary, it opens up a new realm of possibilities for ethnographic inquiry that I find much more relevant for coming to terms with those powerful practices that frustrated the attempts of disaster survivors and reconstruction planners to build a community whose social and material arrangements made sense to disaster survivors and facilitated their execution of daily activities like obtaining employment and finding assistance with childcare. This realm of possibilities for ethnographic inquiry allows for the investigation of the role of 1) mimesis and aesthetics (institutional project reports, scientific positivism in anthropological methods) 2) knowledge hierarchies and epistemic networks (institutional planning and evaluation

guidelines) 3) performativity and discourse 4) narratives of transcendence (markets, economies, cost-benefit analysis, universal subjects like the minimally investing maximizing disaster survivor) 5) the ontology of objects (houses in their relational context) and, 6) human and nonhuman agency in disaster reconstruction.

I find it important to note that, in dealing with these six elements in the ethnography of crisis in Limón de la Cerca, we are dealing with practices and objects and not simply ideologies that are only loosely linked to the realities of an ethnographic location. For example, bringing an end to a debate about how to reconstruct a community through an allusion to a narrative of transcendence (like the specification of the dimension of 200 m² land parcel and its random distribution on the premise that disaster survivors are alienated, individualist, minimally investing maximizing subjects) is an act with material effects. Most importantly, it is a powerful act as it closes up certain possibilities for relationships among people and between people and things and enables others.

Having noted the importance of these six elements in the ethnography of crisis in Limón de la Cerca, I will now provide a brief discussion of how each of these has previously appeared in the anthropological literature and how such appearances have influenced my approach towards postdisaster reconstruction in Southern Honduras.

Before Proceeding: A Note on Heuristic Devices

None of the above mentioned elements (mimesis, the dance of human and nonhuman agency, narratives of transcendence, etc.) of the ethnography of crisis in disaster reconstruction in Limón de la Cerca are real in the sense that they have a singular and fixed definition in the anthropological literature. There is nothing specific about what

they *are*, and they are not stable entities of a transcendental domain like *the economy* or *human nature*. Instead, these elements are heuristic devices, analytical resources that have helped social scientists tackle diverse, complex, and sensitive research questions concerning power, colonialist hierarchizations of knowledge, and what anthropologists call socio-cultural difference. There is a tendency towards semiotic slippage in the concepts that these elements refer to. Pickering's use of performativity, for example, refers to the ways in which scientists and their machines harness nonhuman agency, which is different from Butler's use as the way in which *real* objects are delimited and made to *matter* in reference to a discursive regulatory ideal.

Although some may consider such variation an annoyance or a failure of "post" approaches to establish a rigid lexicon, for postcolonial and poststructural commentators this variation is seen as reflective of productive dialogues between the fields of anthropology, philosophy, gender studies, cultural studies, and science and technology studies. This variation is also reflective of the changing applications of these heuristic devices and the enhancement of techniques for asking research questions about objects of knowledge (discourse, nonhuman agency, power, critiques of representation) that are not considered extant or worthy of inquiry in other schools of anthropological practice.

The brief discussions that follow are not intended to establish a definitive meaning or usage to the analytical language used in this dissertation. They are simply intended to specify how interdisciplinary dialogues and debates about these analytical resources have informed my development of an approach to the anthropology of postdisaster reconstruction. I have gone to great lengths to insure that none of the analytical language employed in this study goes unexplained. Through the use of

extensive parenthetical expressions and repetitive reminders of intended meanings I have done my best to make the following text accessible to the uninitiated. As a means of encouraging a productive intellectual exchange, I also welcome challenges to my definitions, and urge my readers to develop new applications and refinements to these analytical tools.

Resistance and Accommodation: The Dance of Agency in the Reconstruction Encounter

Practice as modeling, I thus realized, has an important real-time structure, with the contours of cultural extension being determined by the emergence in time of resistances, and by the success and failure of accommodations to resistance. This temporal structuring of practice as a dialectic of resistance and accommodation is, in the first instance, what I have come to call the mangle of practice. (Pickering 1995:xi)

The dance of agency, seen asymmetrically from the human end, thus takes the form of a dialectic of resistance and accommodation, where resistance denotes the failure to achieve an intended capture of agency in practice, and accommodation an active human strategy of response to resistance, which can include revisions to goals and intentions as well as to the material form of the machine in question and to the human frame of gestures and social relations that surround it. (Pickering 1995:22)

In this dissertation I theorize the emergence of crisis in postdisaster reconstruction as an effect of the finalizing of multiple mediational encounters between reconstruction actors and forces that established relationships among people and between people and reconstruction resources that severely inhibited the capacity of community residents to carry out mundane and essential tasks. In the case of this ethnography, reconstruction actors and forces include aid agency workers and administrators, local and national governments, street gangs, hurricane displaced populations, strong winds that remove the roofs from houses, discourses (of cost/benefit, universal subjects, body politics), single-

room cinder block houses, the unforgiving sun of Southern Honduras, and seven kilometers of highway road.

As I noted in chapter 1, the arrangements of people and resources that resulted from this encounter were of limited intelligibility for community residents. This limited intelligibility manifested in the form of extreme difficulties in carrying out mundane tasks like finding assistance with childcare, traveling to Choluteca to find work or sell their products, leave their houses after dusk, and form neighborhood constituencies. From such a perspective, crisis is used to denote the condition where disaster survivors find themselves confronting a “form of opaque violence and degree of terror” that “flow from a particular failure:” that of the disaster survivor “to exercise freely such possibilities as he or she has, to give him/herself and the environment in which he/she lives a form of reason that would make everyday existence readable, if not give it actual meaning” (Mbembe 2001:143).

Although Pickering’s original proposing of the term is specifically concerned with the relationship between scientific knowledge and the world at large and the fashioning of the scientist as an expert subject through laboratory practice, Pickering’s concept of the mangle of practice provides a highly appropriate analogy for the approach that I want to develop for the ethnography of disaster reconstruction. Pickering’s dance of agencies is suitable in part, because it draws on Bruno Latour’s and Michel Callon’s work on actor network analysis, an approach that emphasizes the irreducibility of processes like the emergence of a crisis in community reconstruction in Southern Honduras or the victory of the Pasteurian movement over germs in France (Latour 1988). By irreducibility, Latour means that we cannot singularly find explanations of either of these events in

social constructions of disaster victims, or their statistically quantified properties that predetermined them to be *bad victims*, or discourses of cost benefit and neoliberal economics that instantaneously manifested as a collection of disjunctures between project outcomes and disaster survivor needs and desires.

Indeed, the emergence of crisis in Limón de la Cerca is too complex a subject matter to reduce to a single factor as its monistic cause, be it a specific property of disaster survivors that inhibited their capacity to rebuild a community after the hurricane (“they are marginal”, “they are uneducated”, “their dependency ratio is too high”), or the representation of aid agency workers as cohesive and unidimensional embodiments of any one discourse of development. On the contrary, crisis in Limón de la Cerca emerged from a dynamic matrix of encounters, mediations, contestations, confrontations, alliances, appeals to narratives of transcendence, refutations, forceful exclusions, and arbitrary resource distributions that manifested as specific community construction practices.

In this matrix, things like discourses, body politics and narratives of transcendence were forces that key reconstruction actors made alliances with in order to bring certain dialogues or debates about how to proceed in the reconstruction of a community to a close. The notion of alliances, however, should not be interpreted as suggestive that reconstruction actors made conscious decisions from adiscursive spaces (rational choice). On the contrary, the profound internalization of discourses of rationality, humanitarian benevolence, and alterity in expertise, combined with the experiences that helped mould the subjectivities of these actors, created subjects upon which some imaginaries and body politics resonated more than others.

It was at these moments that specific decisions as to how to reconstruct Limón de la Cerca were made, and these decisions were accompanied by practices in the distribution of land parcels, the determination of home construction materials and household space distribution (to give just a few examples) that, in turn, created conditions that severely inhibited the capacity of disaster survivors to make existence synthetically readable and functional. Chapter 4 will give an introduction to the actors and forces at play in the dance of agency in the reconstruction of Limón de la Cerca, while Chapters 5 and 6 will give detailed demonstrations of this matrix in action.

Pickering's work on the mangle of practice is also relevant to the anthropology of development and disaster reconstruction because it calls attention to issues concerning the capacity of scientific machines and technologies to replicate certain effects (the harnessing of nonhuman agency, to perform a specific action) from one location to another. According to Pickering, the close examination of historic reenactments of scientific experiments demonstrates that replicating exact results from one laboratory to another is not as simple as following a specified set of instructions. Instead, the replication of experimental outcomes requires the mangling or modification of equipment or rearrangement of objects of study to replicate a certain effect. Simply put, technologies do not necessarily work as expected "out the box" but require a process of transformation or mangling, of accommodating to newly encountered human and nonhuman agencies, for them to work in an intended way.

For anthropologists interested in technology transfer this is an observation that should not be overlooked because it points to a key element in the making of commensurable forms of disaster reconstruction. Andrew Maskrey (1995) has noted that

for reconstruction housing programs to be successful, it is important to establish a feedback process between planners, architects and beneficiaries that will permit the transformation of reconstruction assistance into a locally relevant, intelligible and functional package. This process of transformation, massaging, or mangling must occur through a dialectical process of resistances and accommodations on the part of multiple reconstruction actors (planners, project managers, beneficiaries, architects) for projects to be beneficial in a multidimensional way.

In the case of Marcelino Champagnat, for example, this process of resistance and accommodation took place when an international donor agency (CARE) approached community leaders with a plan for the construction of houses whose dimensions and spatial distribution was not considered adequate by the latter. In this case, community leaders presented a resistance to the intentionality of CARE program managers to build a specific type of house. CARE program managers, on the other hand, had every intention of providing an adequate housing package, but encountered a resistance to their intention in the form of an internalized cost-benefit narrative. The response of CARE program managers was to accommodate this resistance by obtaining another housing design that more closely resembled the homes that community leaders desired, and cutting project costs by avoiding the hiring of architects and other nonessential personnel. Through a mediational process in which various reconstruction actors expressed their intentions and desires, and accommodated to various forms of human and nonhuman agencies and resistances (cost-benefit stipulations, beneficiary and donor desires and intentionalities) project managers and community leaders in Marcelino Champagnat were able to devise a housing reconstruction program that proved beneficial to all parties involved.

In contrast, in the case of Limón de la Cerca the mediational transformation of reconstruction assistance was prematurely aborted on several key occasions. These critical disruptions took place when key reconstruction actors (town mayor, land distribution committee, Samaritan's purse housing program architects) interrupted the mangling of reconstruction aid through their allusion to specific narratives of transcendence, natures, or body politics (cost-benefit, the disaster survivor as an alienated minimally investing, maximizing universal subject, the aesthetics of international aid where donors are magnanimous and beneficiares are silent and grateful). The case of housing reconstruction in Marcelino Champagnat and Limón de la Cerca will be reviewed in further detail in Chapter 4.

Narratives of Transcendence, Cultural Narratives and the Body Politic

For Anne Balsamo (1996) a cultural narrative is a collective story that is told in a certain location about a subject in the form of practices, the design and use of technologies, the making of knowledge, and the enactment of surveillance. This collective story differs from other forms of narration like oral literature or the modern novel because it is seldom, or, more likely, never, told or written. It is covert and diffused. It is hidden in the wide open like foucaudian power (Foucault 1990). The story has characters that we can call tropes (needy beneficiaries, passive victims, reconstruction experts) and performative objects (biological bodies, economic realities). The story is also contingent on a history of conceptualizing and delimiting who (women, fetuses, disaster survivors) and what those characters are (tropes and performative objects), and what relationships are possible between them and others (Butler 1993). This is what Judith Butler refers to as performative materialization. Fetuses can be either

citizens or noncitizens, human or nonhuman and can be aborted or are given rights over their mothers. Disaster survivors can be needy subjects who must quietly accept distributed aid, they can be subjects who singularly maximize the benefits of minimal investments and build communities as independent actors, or they can be subjects that exist in an integrated matrix of neighborly, political and regional relationships, and whose capacity to build communities is contingent on the favorable working of these relationships. Or, in Butler's own words:

The category of "sex" [or any modernist category for that matter] is, from the start, normative, it is what Foucault has called a "regulatory ideal." In this sense, then, "sex" not only functions as a norm but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce-demarcate, circulate, differentiate- the bodies it controls. (Butler 1993:1)

Performativity is that power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration. (Butler 1993:20)

A related concept is that of the body politic (Haraway 1991) as the notion that social systems are, or should be, a reflection of an underlying natural order that transcends cultural differences. These transcendental orders are things like the biology of human bodies and the cultural materialism of societies that allegedly lie at the bottom of human realities (Bonvillain 1995, Harris 2001, Margolis 1995). Haraway's approach to this concept begins to illuminate how the power of such narratives originates from their appeal to the premise that there is a singular nature, an integrated universal system of order. As her analyses reveal however, this system of order is best described as a text that is contingent on science as a historically located form of politics (politics of gender, race, nationalism, colonialism). Haraway concludes:

Nature is constructed, constituted historically, not discovered naked in a fossil bed or a tropical forest. Nature is contested...(Haraway 1991:106)

We can both know that our bodies, other animals, fossils, and what have you are proper objects for scientific investigation, and remember how historically determined is our part in the construction of the object. It is not an accident of nature that our social and evolutionary knowledge of animals, hominids and ourselves has been developed in functionalist and capitalist economic terms. (Haraway 1991:42)

The relevance of these discussions to the anthropology of disaster reconstruction is tangible and practical and not merely theoretical and ethically suspect for ignoring the pressing conditions confronted by Limón residents in 2000. In a vital way, the relevance of these discussions is material and immediate. Narratives of transcendence, notions of the body politic, and cultural narratives about postdisaster assistance were powerful agents in the dance of agency of disaster reconstruction in Southern Honduras. These agents became powerful allies for key reconstruction actors at critical moments during the design and execution of assistance programs. These agents also permitted these actors to bring discussions as to how to distribute assistance and how to reconstruct communities to an end, to give form to decisions concerning these activities, and therefore to influence the shaping of material conditions in Limón in a significant way. Furthermore, in the case of crucial events (the distribution of land parcels, the design of housing structures, the electrification of the community), these agents allowed for the premature abortion of those processes of technology and program mangling that permitted the formulation of mutually intelligible forms of assistance in places like Marcelino Champagnat.

Narratives of transcendence, cultural narratives of disaster assistance, and notions of the body politic are ways of thinking about the role of discourse in disaster reconstruction, but I would like to emphasize that an interest in discourse should not be

equated with a monistic explanation of conditions in Limón de la Cerca as the inevitable linear trajectory of a discursive deployment. Following feminist critiques of Foucault (McNay 1993), I do not suggest that discourses (of capitalism, democracy or development) are ever fully realized, or that people are merely identical replicas of discursive categories. The reconstruction actors that made key decisions as to how to reconstruct Limón de la Cerca were therefore not the cohesive embodiment of development, neoliberal economics, or cost-benefit discourses. These actors were fragmented and heterogeneous in their standpoints, misgivings, and opinions about disaster reconstruction. Nonetheless, what remains of interest are the alliances they made with these discourses, the reasons these discourses resonated more than others, and the powers that they were vested with in the moment of making such alliances.

Mimesis, Representation and the Ontology of Objects

And doesn't a caricature capture the essence, making the copy magically powerful over the original? (Taussig 1996:5)

Michael Taussig conceptualizes mimesis as the process of making likenesses and of mobilizing these likenesses to subversively assume power over the very things they represent. In a way, the likeness could be said to become that which is represented not on the merit of identical replication but on the merit of a simultaneous and magical making and capturing of essence (whose existence does not precede the moment of mimicry), and therefore the likeness becomes more real than the thing represented. Under such a spell, racist, sexist, and homophobic representations, become more intelligible and real to their interpreters than the collection of behaviors practiced by people delimited as black, male, lesbian, etc. Mimetic likenesses are not simply copies, but they are copies that are

executed in the context of a particular history of representation (Foucault 1970) of making things recognizable and understandable (Good 1994).

The making of likeness involves more than the execution of an intelligible similarity, it involves the application of the laws of contiguity and contagion, elements of sympathetic magic outlined by James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. Under these principles, photographic images are said to represent that which *is* in its totality (documentary photography) because of the connection created by light between the object that is photographed and the chemically treated photographic negatives that capture its image (Taussig 1993). In a similar fashion, the procured hair of a scorned lover or a skinfold caliper assume the power to represent and, in some cases, control the object they have been in contact with (a lover, a child) on the merit that these bodies were contiguous at one point.

Mimesis is an important element to consider because it brings to the forefront questions about the politics of knowledge, representation and the ontology of objects in disaster reconstruction. What is it that disaster survivors *are*? what objects and what arrangements of objects are their worlds composed of? Are these objects and their properties (ontology) shared by other reconstruction actors like anthropologists, nutritionists, project planners and managers? How do disaster survivors emerge as a knowable object in institutional project reports, public relations brochures (figure 2-3) and nutritional analyses? How do these representations correlate or not with disaster survivor subjectivities? In the cases when these do not correlate, what critical disjunctures are created when a mimetic representation is given preeminence as a way of knowing and making decisions about disaster reconstruction over the claims and

demands for different arrangements of reconstruction resources by community residents? These are questions of great relevance to the anthropology of disaster reconstruction, and, for such a reason, they will be a principal concern in the remaining chapters. Moreover, these are not lofty theoretical questions concerned solely with “meaning,” they are questions of materiality, of the arrangement of resources and bodies after a catastrophic event.

Keeping Perspective: Back to Honduras

By 1998 Honduras was a textbook example of a disaster. Regional estimates of deforestation ranged from 64 to 85%, 78% of the population lived under the World Bank’s poverty line, and 70% of the farms were smaller than 3.5 hectares (Paolisso et al. 1999). An image from Frederic Cuny’s (1983) *Disasters and Development* summarizes the catastrophe from the vulnerability perspective:

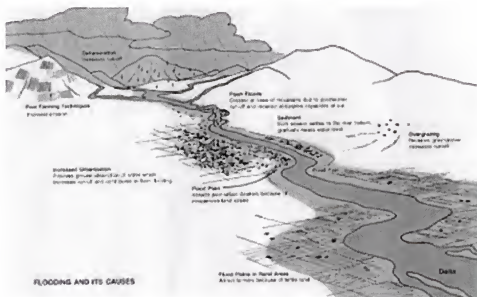


Figure 2-1. Flooding and its causes. Source: Cuny 1983.

Just as Cuny gives us an image of the causes of a flood, he also gives us an image of how to prevent one (Figure 2-2). The image tells us that there is a plan for managing

development practices, and how are these relations involved in the enhancement of the destructive effects of agents like Hurricane Mitch?

Granted, Cuny's project, like this dissertation, takes form around a particular framing of research questions and interests, but such awareness simply brings the politics of knowledge to the forefront of this discussion for yet another time. What is it that comes to *matter* in vulnerability theory, and how do such matters of concern opaque others that are equally relevant, if not more so, in the reconstruction of communities?

These are the fundamental issues surrounding the reconstruction of Limón de la Cerca. The Master Plan for National Reconstruction and Transformation of Honduras (MPNRT) (Plan Maestro Para la Reconstrucción y Transformación Nacional PMPRTN) recognizes the urban and rural poor as the populations most affected by the storm, and therefore, the focal population in the reconstruction process. The plan is ambitious in its scope.

With its execution it is intended to make an important stride towards *sustainable development*, through the integration of key themes like poverty mitigation, the sustainable management of natural resources and the strengthening of democratic participation. (Gabinete Especial de la Reconstrucción Nacional de Honduras 1999:2, italics are my emphasis, translation by author)

Given these objectives, the plan approaches poverty through four points of concern:

- 1) Poverty is related to the lack of access of the poor to factors of production.
- 2) Poverty is linked to educational and health deficiencies.
- 3) Poverty and ecological degradation are very closely associated.
- 4) Poverty and democratic participation: In the past, the lack of adequate mechanisms through which the poor could demand their basic human rights has contributed to a high level of poverty in the country. (Gabinete Especial de la Reconstrucción Nacional de Honduras 1999:3, translation by author)

Just as Cuny's image is generic, epistemologically narrow, and lacking in specificity as to how flood plain management is to be implemented, these objectives for Honduran national reconstruction seem surreally detached from the complex and messy

collection of encounters, contestations, and collaborations that comprise this process. As a response to the stipulation of such objectives, this dissertation examines the messy process of community reconstruction by focusing on the ways in which people, families and communities experience the process of Honduran national reconstruction in one locality. Doing so, however, places this ethnography in an antithetical position in relation to a considerable amount of institutional knowledge produced about Limón de la Cerca.

Under the heading “Participation for Reconstruction” (“Participación para la reconstrucción”), the *Informe de Gobeirno Municipal 1998/1999* (Choluteca Municipality 2000, figure 2-3) of Choluteca presents an idyllic image of Limón. Perfectly aligned cinder brick homes flank the sides of a principal dirt road and tall poles are connected by wires that carry electricity to some distant destination. The photographs do not show the *Mara Salvatrucha* graffiti that adorns many of the houses, or the 300 abandoned living units that have had their tin roofs and wooden doors stolen under the cover of dark. The images also do not show the small tornados that periodically rip the roofs from houses, sometimes with fatal consequences, nor do they show the prematurely cracking walls of these poorly constructed structures.

The resettlement literature tells us that the uprooting of populations can have dire consequences for the social, economic, nutritional and health status of communities (Cernea 1996, Kloos 1990, Mulholland 1985, Shears and Lusty 1987). These are not inevitable effects that surface against the best efforts of community members and institutions, and the political dynamics that result in these outcomes are well known (Cernea 1996, Guggenheim and Cernea 1993). It is also known that the reconstruction of communities requires more than the simple transfer of materials and funds from donors

Participación para la Reconstrucción

En 1998 todo era esperanzador en Choluteca, la economía crecía y la capital de la agro industria visualizaba un futuro promisorio. Pero todo este potencial económico, fue reducido por el fenómeno nacional MITCH. La ciudad fue afectada en un 18 por ciento, equivalente a nueve barrios totalmente destruidos y ocho en forma parcial.

Informes estadísticos reportaron tres mil viviendas afectadas, 167 muertos y 500 millones de lempiras en pérdidas en activos de viviendas, a esto se suma el cementerio que quedó totalmente destruido.

La industria camarонера fue afectada en un 100 por ciento, la melonera en un 40, la azucarera en un 70, las vías de comunicación en un 60. También fue afectada los granos básicos y ganadería. La inundación provocó una evacuación de 39,200 personas, los cuales se ubicaron en 202 albergues provisionales; escuelas e iglesias y municipalidad.

La Corporación de Choluteca se convirtió en un ente facilitador através de Compra y gestión de terrenos donde se construyeron las viviendas a los ciudadanos reubicados.

En la ciudad nueva se compraron 114 manzanas de terreno por valor 3,573,000.00 millones de lempiras, don-



En la reubicación Colonias Unidas, se asentaron 1500 familias, donde ya se han construido 120 casas por parte de la iglesia evangélica.



Vista panorámica de Ciudad Nueva donde han sido beneficiadas más de mil familias.

P.18 INFORME DE GOBIERNO 98/99

Figure 2-3. Choluteca Municipality Year 1998/1999 Annual Report. Source: Choluteca Municipality 2000.

to recipients, and that this relationship involves more than a de-politicized “desire to help” (Oliver-Smith 1991, Oliver-Smith and Hansen 1982, Gronemeyer 1993).

Community empowerment, participation, cultural relevance of housing structures and avoidance of external standard impositions are listed time and time again as top priorities in community reconstruction. This beckons the question: How could Limón de la Cerca happen? In the chapters that follow it is my intention to show how the analytical resources I have just reviewed can help us not only answer this question, but also help disaster experts and program managers prevent the recurrence of the processes that led to such an outcome.

If judged by the criteria listed by Oliver-Smith (1991) by which to evaluate reconstruction programs, Limón de la Cerca must receive an unsatisfactory mark. Limón, however, is not an absolute failure or a lost cause. Despite the countless institutional failures, abandoned houses, gang fights, lack of electricity, and small land parcels, 904 families continued to struggle in their attempt to reestablish a sense of intelligibility during the period of this ethnography. Their struggle was marked by small victories, like the plastering of a house, or the planting of tree that would one day shade a conversation between neighbors from the harsh southern sun.

Limón de la Cerca is not necessarily representative of community reconstruction outcomes nationwide. Within the *Departamento* of Choluteca, the communities of Morolica (Olivio-Díaz Lopez 2002) and Marcelino Champagnat stand out as exemplary case studies of fruitful interactions between communities, NGOs and governments. In recent years, anthropologists have become aware of the broad variation that global processes can have on local populations. The understanding of the different ways in which people and their communities interpret and experience these processes requires both local and institutional studies (Ribeiro 1994).

Despite the many differences between Limón de la Cerca and other nearby reconstruction communities, its ethnography provides a fundamental illustration of the issues at stake in disaster reconstruction and the ways in which conflicts are mediated and resolved throughout this process. Limón de la Cerca is also not just any community, it is the largest reconstruction site in Southern Honduras, and, as such, is symbolic of a broader experience shared by 35,000 families that lost their homes during the storm.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH SITES AND METHODS

Choluteca is the southernmost department of Honduras. Located on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Fonseca (figure 3-1), it is nested between El Salvador and Nicaragua and serves as a point of passage for goods, travelers and migrants, whether they are traveling through Central America or have the interior of Honduras as their final destination. Geographically, Choluteca is considered part of the country's southern region, a denomination it shares with the department of Valle to its east, and the southern extremes of Francisco Morazán and El Paraíso to its north.

The southern region features a mix of low hills and mountains, tropical savanna and mangrove swamps in the areas surrounding the gulf (Pineda Portillo et al. 1999, Thompson et al. 1985). Seasons are divided into dry, from December to April, and rainy, from May to November. Precipitation is not necessarily constant during the rainy season. It declines in July and August, and peaks in September, with maximum reported levels reaching 345 mm. Temperatures range between 23.4 C and 40 C depending on the time of the year, with the hottest temperatures being reached at the end of the dry season in April. The municipality of Choluteca, a further political subdivision of the department by the same name and the primary area of investigation in this ethnography, is generally known for its hot temperatures and semi arid environment (Stonich 1993). In demographic terms, Choluteca is the 5th (out of a total of 18 departments) most populous department of Honduras. With a population of 390,305 inhabitants, it ranks 6th as the most densely settled (83.5 residents per km²)(Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2001).

Choluteca's economic production includes the cultivation of sugar cane, melons, and watermelon in the coastal grasslands, while parts of the mangrove estuaries have



Figure 3-1. Map of Honduras. Source: Honduras, Instituto Geográfico Nacional.

been adapted for use as commercial shrimp farms during the last two decades (DeWalt 1998). Cattle ranching and the processing of dairy products is another major economic enterprise. This is supplemented by the cultivation of basic grains including maize and sorghum. In the major urban area of the City of Choluteca, the departmental capital, these occupational patterns give way to construction, clerical services, commercial transportation, and logistical support for Choluteca's agricultural industry.

Regional History

In terms of historical context, the discussion of how Choluteca fits within the broader context of Meso and Central American colonial history brings up several

historiographical issues. There are certain themes that abound in the historical literature concerning Honduras, and, especially, its southern region (D'Ans 1996, McLeod 1973, Stonich 1993). These histories invariably tell the tale of a Honduras that emerged from the political delineation of the country during Spanish colonial rule (A.D.1524-1821), and which remained the neglected, deficient, underdeveloped, ugly sibling of the Central American sister nations until present times. From the period of independence, through the Liberal Reforms of the late 19th century, post World War II international development, and until the present era of transnationalism and globalization, Honduras has been written into history as the region, colony, nation and banana republic that has continually failed to successfully integrate into international markets, solidify internal trade and infrastructural networks, or has constituted the periphery of central areas of colonial development like Guatemala. As a result, Honduras, and, to a greater extent, Choluteca has continually been thought about in terms of deficiency and failure to culminate the supposedly teleological trajectory of modernity (Ferguson 1999). The tendency that I want to call attention to is exemplified in the following citations from Susan Stonich's *I am destroying the land* and André Marcel D'Ans' *Honduras: Emergencia Difícil de una Nación, de un Estado*:

Its rugged terrain, which made transportation from the Pacific to Caribbean coast extremely difficult and costly, hindered the political and social integration of Honduras and inhibited the early development of profitable export industries, and thus the establishment of a unified national economy. Southern Honduras, with its emphasis on livestock, mining and later indigo production, was but one of a collection of separate regional economies within the country. It remained a backwater within a Honduras that was itself geographically, economically and politically peripheral to the Spanish American empire. (Stonich 1993:52)

From the 16th century on, Honduras sinks into an ecological, economic and cultural decadence. (D'Ans 1996:66, my translation)

I make mention of this issue not with the intent of dismissing the realities of the various movements of conquest, colonialism, independence, liberal reforms, international development that left undeniable marks on the region. After all, discursive practices like conquest, conversion, the establishment of *encomiendas* and *reducciones*, plantation agriculture, mining and fruit company concessions that accompanied each of these movements established specific relations between people, populations, resources and environments and precluded others, giving form to localities like Choluteca. It is not so easy, then, to dismiss the materiality and relational realities of the region's history as an artifact of narration with no relevance to the conditions confronted by the anthropologist during field research.

At the same time, continued reliance on a development-inspired language of failed modernity, dependency, and deficiency as a means of describing history and actuality of the region has the propensity to obscure a significant wealth of ethnographic detail and upholds certain assumptions about the inherent desirability and inevitability of development as leading towards a singular form of modernity (Gaonkar 2001). Admittedly, the liberal reforms of the late 19th century and the granting of massive concessions to international mining and fruit companies in the 20th century created certain distributions of people and resources and balances of trade that were advantageous only to limited sectors of Honduras' population. But these macro economic distributions and arrangements do not encompass the complete picture of the region and make no mention of the ways people in these localities live meaningful lives, are not continually subjugated by an ever present awareness of a failed modernity, and develop

resourceful strategies with the intention of fulfilling material and symbolic needs and desires.

This chapter strikes a balance between the realities of Honduras' place in the broader network of worldwide economic and migration flows (Appadurai 1996), the relational and material outcomes the discursive movements that have left their mark on the area (colonialism, mercantilism etc), and the timely commentary by a number of anthropologists (Adams 1998, Ferguson 1999, Gaonkar 2001) who have noted the importance of recognizing the existence of multiple forms of modernity as an alternative to the self-perpetuating practice of branding the major regions of the world as a failed modernity and in continued need of assistance to attain this imaginary.

For this reason, Choluteca and Southern Honduras are not presented here as simply the periphery of colonial Central America that has yet to achieve its potential form, for such a language subjugates this research locality to a continued judgment of failure and abjection, and holds anthropological inquiry captive to the continued obsession with the transformation of Choluteca into a type of modernity that may very well be unobtainable (Adams 1998). Instead, Choluteca is approached as a place that is livable, functional, meaningful, and navigable despite its continued condemnation by anthropologists and historians as underdeveloped and marginal. This approach does not deny the presence of pressing problems, inequalities and conditions of vulnerability that exacerbated the effects of Hurricane Mitch in 1998, but it also does not reduce the region and its inhabitants to these, as such a representation glosses over the ethnographic complexity of Choluteca and inhibits our capacity to understand the motivations and perspectives of disaster reconstruction actors.

Most histories of the Central American Isthmus place a greater emphasis on the last 500 years of habitation for reasons of limited historical evidence, eurocentrism and colonialist legacies in the making of historical knowledge (Larkin 1997). Because this ethnography draws on such sources of knowledge, and for the sake of brevity, it is limited to a similar perspective and focus. It is because of such a legacy, that I begin this discussion of Choluteca's historical context with the recurring division of pre-Columbian and colonial periods, but I would like to note that this is done for purposes of expediency and not from a default assumption that European colonization enjoys a status as a primordial event in the shaping of central American subjectivity and locality.

Prior to the 15th century conquest of the Central American isthmus, the region that is today Honduras was inhabited by 400,000 to 500,000 people (D'Ans 1996), although some estimates suggest a higher figure (Stonich 1993). These populations belonged to what contemporary anthropologists recognize as the Chorotega-Mangue, Ulua and Poton cultures (Stone 1957). In contrast to the cultures of Mesoamerica, isthmus populations did not develop state level societies, writing systems or monumental architecture. Instead, western Honduras, Nicaragua and present day Costa Rica were settled at the time of contact by chiefdom level or less stratified societies that relied on a combination of multicrop horticulture, slash and burn small scale agriculture, hunting and the exploitation of riverine environments for their subsistence (Pipperno and Pearsall 1998). Planted crops included maize, beans, squash, chilies, and cacao. These populations maintained low population densities and demonstrated the capacity to rapidly recover from catastrophic events such as volcanic explosions and tropical storms (Sheets 1999).

It is common knowledge among students of colonial Mesoamerica that the conquest of Central America and the early colonial period of the 16th century witnessed the calamitous decimation of indigenous populations as a result of population displacement, disruption of food production systems, small pox epidemics, and excessive labor demands on the part of Spanish colonial authorities. Honduras was no exception, and, by 1590, the indigenous population of 400,000 was reduced to 18,000. In the midst of this precipitous depopulation, the southern region of Honduras entered the historical record as the location of early colonial gold finds. In 1521, gold was discovered in various rivers of Choluteca, and gold panning, cattle ranching and salt production became the primary economic enterprises (D'Ans 1996). One year later, the town of Choluteca was founded, but it remained a small settlement populated only by a few families (Stone 1957, Stonich 1993). In this same period a *reducción* -a forced resettlement of indigenous peoples for purposes of population control and labor extraction- was also settled in the surrounding area.

By 1570 a series of silver and gold strikes in the mines of Tegucigalpa, Comayagua, Guascarán and Santa Lucia switched the focus of mining away from the southern region, and the highlands became the center of economic and political administrative activities. From the 16th to the 19th century, Choluteca maintained an emphasis on cattle ranching, small scale mining and, later on, indigo production. Because of the regional shift in mining activities, the southern region is said to have remained marginal in relation to the overall national economy.

This situation would change somewhat in the late 19th century with the introduction of liberal reforms that facilitated the reopening of mines the southern region

by foreign investors. This new mining boom attracted migration by Salvadoran, Honduran, Welsh, Italian and German families, which eventually became part of a growing merchant class in Choluteca (Stonich 1993). In addition to increased migration, this second mining boom was accompanied by infrastructural works like the building and improvement of dirt roads to principal ports and Tegucigalpa.

In the 20th century, Choluteca's economic production underwent several modifications with the introduction of new export crops such as melons and the transformation of estuary environments for shrimp production (DeWalt 1998). Throughout these changes, Choluteca is said to have remained somewhat separate from regional events that had a greater impact on the country's north coast and central highland areas. Land concessions to North American fruit companies- and event that is said to have shaped much of Honduras' political and economic life during the post WWII period- were granted primarily in the northern coast of the country. Furthermore, geographic and logistical conditions such as the ruggedness of the country's mountainous terrains and the absence of major industrial ports in the south limited the inclusion of Choluteca in late 20th century national economic enterprises like the opening of *maquiladora* textile assembly factories.

With the exception of urban centers like Choluteca and Nacaome, settlement patterns throughout the region took the form of large and medium sized cattle ranches in the southern lowlands and scattered peasant homesteads in the southern highlands (Stonich 1993). It is to one of these urban settings that we now turn our attention to as one of the primary research sites of this study.

Choluteca

This study was conducted from July of 2000 to August of 2001 in three Cholutecan localities including the city of Choluteca and two post-disaster resettlement communities located 6 km east of the town (Figure 3-2). The official demographic classification of Choluteca according to the 1996 national census is of medium sized city (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2001). This classification is based on the fact that this is the place residence of over 70,000 people, a substantial portion of the municipality's 120,000 residents (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2001).

Still, Choluteca's status as a city, and the cosmopolitan sentiments such a title evokes, is playfully disputed by some of its residents who frequently say "esto no es ciudad, es un pueblón" (this is not a big city, it's a big ugly town). This is an interesting choice of words because *pueblón* captures the sense of emotional ambivalence that I came to share with many residents towards the town. For the Hondurans from the more cosmopolitan cities of San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa that I came to know during my year of fieldwork, Choluteca's flavor of urbanism seems like a derailed attempt to emulate the sophistication of its larger sisters. For the newly arrived, Choluteca's major avenues may easily appear as a place where recent urban development has delivered a harsh, if not violent, reality that is almost antithetical to the enhancement of quality of life. Major avenues like *El Boulevard*, which leads from the eastern border of barrio *El Centro*, towards the Panamerican Highway (Figure 3-2) seem inhospitable during the hottest hours of the day. Scarce tree shade, accelerating semi trucks, and the incessant



Figure 3-2. Map of Choluteca. Source: Honduras, Instituto Geográfico Nacional.

honking of taxi driver's horns can make a simple walk through Choluteca's principal avenue an unsavory experience.

At the same time, *El Boulevard* is dotted by small oases where the collection workers that keep the town in action, from truck drivers and mechanics to office clerks,

can find respite from the severity of hot asphalt, swirling dust, and diesel exhausts. These oases are the *pincho* (grilled skewered beef or pork), *pupusa* (tortillas stuffed with cheese and sausage) and fried chicken stands that line the boulevard-turned highway. The most notable of these feature shady trees, music systems blaring Mexican *rancheras* and television sets broadcasting soccer matches or the latest *telenovela*. In contrast, the more humble establishments are limited to wooden sheds where foods are prepared and a few benches on the adjacent sidewalks provide customers a place to sit and pass the time.

If *El Boulevard*, with its mixture of gasoline stations and their pungent smell of overheated motor oil, rumbling semi trucks, and comforting food stands sets the tone for the eastern side of Choluteca, then the principal north-south street, *La primera calle* sets the mood for the Southwestern extreme. *La primera calle* runs from the same *Barrio El Centro* where *El Boulevard* begins to the central market in the southern extremity of the town. This is the heart of Choluteca's merchant district where multiple family-owned stores sell everything from soaps to leather shoes and purses. The family stores maintain their roll-up iron gates open throughout the day, and their merchandize displays spill over onto the narrow sidewalks. These are met halfway on the opposite direction by the countless stools, tables, boxes and baskets of the more mobile street vendors that set up their stalls on the sidewalk step on a daily basis. Sandals, underwear, fruit, tortillas and fish are all laid out for shoppers to pick at and examine. Walking through the remaining space, between the ambulatory merchants, and the merchandize displays of family stores one hears the voices of store attendants enticing would be customers "*que busca joven, que desea?*" What are you searching for, young man, what do you desire?

The *primera calle* is also the place where major transnational appliance store chains like *Radio Shack* and *Elektra* have opened franchise stores, giving the place a dynamic atmosphere where small to large scale merchants rub elbows with one another and provide goods and services to customers from the most humble to the financially accommodated. The architecture of this part of town is a mixture of mid century adobe structures which have been slowly displaced by adjacent brick constructions. The building facades are simple, painted in double tones of greens browns and blues, or simply white. The older buildings have slanted tile roofs, while the more recent structures have flat cement or tin instead. The age of each building can be gauged by the thickness of its walls. From the dilapidated barbershops with their moisture-trapping meter-thick constructions and wooden *machimbre* (thin lattice) ceilings, to the narrow profiles of the freshly painted bricks of the air conditioned appliance stores, *primera calle*, like most of Choluteca, is a place where old and more recent styles and technologies are mixed in nuanced, unexpectedly functional, and sometimes uncomfortable ways.

Choluteca's two movie theatres are also located on the southern extreme of this street. It is here that advertising posters for dated American comedies, European pornography and the latest international action adventure blockbusters share cramped quarters on a glass-encased bulletin board. Barbershops, Chinese restaurants, and bakeries occupy the remaining locales. The finishing touch of this district is Hotel Pierre and its adjacent discotheque, a place where Cholutecan young adults mingle with curious North American and European travelers, Peace Corps volunteers and the occasional *mara* (street gang) member that manages to sneak by door security.

In the southern extreme of *Primera Calle*, beyond the cinemas, newspaper vendors and appliance stores lies the *Mercado Nuevo*, the town market. The *Mercado Nuevo* is a wide and flat, single story, cement and brick structure, divided into small cubicles where vegetables, fruits, coffee, dairy products, butchered animals and even fully cooked meals may be purchased. For many of the disaster survivors that participated in this ethnographic study, especially women, the *Mercado Nuevo* and *Primera Calle* were focal areas of economic activity. This was particularly so for those who sold tortillas, fast foods, used clothes, fruits and vegetables. Men also found employment as *cargadores* (truck loaders) or managed stalls at the market.

As I noted earlier, the *Barrio El Centro* acts as a hub for the two districts of *El Boulevard* and *Primera Calle*. While *Barrio El Centro* is a quieter, primarily residential area of town, it is also the political administrative center of the town and municipality. *El parque central* is a modest square that lies at the heart of this neighborhood. It is an aging structure, with cement walkways, benches and small trees. Surrounding it are the municipality offices, the central police station, an elementary school, and the *Catedral*, a 19th century Catholic church whose massive whitewashed walls and dome reflect the powerful Choluteca sun to create an eye catching effect.

The Hurricane Affected Neighborhoods

To the northeast and northwest of *Barrio El Centro* lie a series of contiguous neighborhoods that were severely affected by the flooding that resulted from the passing of Hurricane Mitch. These neighborhoods, with the exception of *Barrio El Hospital*, are delimited on their northern edge by the shores of the Choluteca River. The majority of the residents in the two reconstruction communities where the ethnographic research for this

dissertation was conducted either lived in these neighborhoods before the storm, or lived in similar riverfront neighborhoods that were completely destroyed during the Hurricane's flooding.

Because these neighborhoods were the place of residence for many Limón de la Cerca residents and because they demographically and socioeconomically resembled those neighborhoods that were completely destroyed during the storm, they were collectively selected as one of three sites for the completion of household nutritional surveys. These surveys were conducted with the intention of creating a control group for gauging the differential impacts of the postdisaster reconstruction process on household economy, health, and nutrition. Table 3-1 lists the neighborhoods where surveys were conducted by name and the frequency of surveys in each.

Table 3-1 Riverfront neighborhoods of Choluteca included in study and number of household surveys conducted in each.

Neighborhood	Number of Surveys Completed
Brisas del Rio	1
Buenos Aires	7
Corbeta	14
Hospital	5
Graneros	1
La Cruz	11
Las Arenas	10
Los Mangos	14
Morazan	7
<i>Total</i>	70

These neighborhoods contain a mix of household architectural styles and families of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds that inhibits their simple categorization as central or marginal, working class or middle class *barrios*. *Barrio Los Mangos*, for example, is the place of residence of Cholutecans that are dedicated to entrepreneurial and clerical

activities just as much as it is home to small-scale dairy farmers, ambulatory vendors and agricultural wage laborers. In a similar fashion, *Barrio La Cruz* features a mixture of household construction types that range from *bajareque* (wattle and daub) constructions to plastered, steel-reinforced brick. Rather than emphasizing a singular and homogenized quality as being descriptive of any one of these neighborhoods, I would like call attention to the mosaic quality of Cholutecan urbanism. As a way of demonstrating this mosaic quality, I list the multiple occupations listed by residents of the 9 neighborhoods where surveys were conducted in tables 3-2 and 3-3.

Although a significant proportion of female survey respondents listed housekeeping as their primary occupation, it is important to note that this category masks their engagement in other activities such as housekeeping for wages in other households, the tending of small family stores, the occasional cleaning of laundry for other families, and the making of snack foods for sale at the household. The occupations of male partners or eldest employed male in surveyed households listed in table 3-3, in contrast, shows a greater amount of diversity in types of employment, helping me stress the point that the riverfront neighborhoods of Choluteca are a place of complex residence and occupational patterns

Table 3-2 Occupations of female survey respondents in riverfront neighborhoods of Choluteca.

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent of Sample</u>
Housekeeper	41	59.4
Laundry Maid	7	10.1
Ambulatory Sales	4	5.6
Seamstress	3	4.3
Family Store Owner	2	2.9
Teacher	2	2.9
Tortilla Vendor	2	2.9
Merchant	2	2.9

Table 3-2. Continued

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent of Sample</u>
Street Sweeper	1	1.4
Secretary	1	1.4
Shrimp Farm Laborer	1	1.4
Maid	1	1.4
Landlord	1	1.4
Missing Data	2	2.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Table 3-3 Occupations of female survey respondents' male partners or oldest employed male in household.

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage of Sample</u>
Taxi/Truck Driver	10	14.0
Construction Worker	11	15.4
Merchant	7	10.1
Agricultural Laborer	5	7.2
Electrician/Technician	5	7.2
Accountant	4	5.8
Mechanic	4	5.8
Carpenter	3	4.3
Student	2	2.9
Extracts river sand	2	2.9
Police officer	2	2.9
Retail sales	2	2.9
Repairs Tires	1	1.4
Gasoline Attendant	1	1.4
Delivers Packages	1	1.4
Teacher	1	1.4
Security Guard	1	1.4
Welder	1	1.4
Unemployed	2	2.9
Missing Data	5	7.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100.0</i>

To add further elaboration to the image that of Choluteca's riverfront neighborhoods that I want to portray, I have included Table 3-4 that lists the frequency of the different types of home construction in the 9 surveyed neighborhoods. The table also lists the percentage of houses with access to potable water and electricity.

Table 3-4 Housing material and conditions in 9 hurricane affected neighborhoods of Choluteca.

Wall material	Percentage of Surveyed Households
Cement block	65.2
Wood	20.3
Adobe	8.7
<i>Bajareque</i> (Waddle and daub)	5.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>
 Roof Material	
Concrete	1.4
Asbestos	14.5
Zinc	18.8
Clay tile	62.3
Missing Data	2.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>
 Potable Water	
Has access to potable water in property	82.6
Does not have potable water in property	17.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>
 Electricity	
Has electricity in household	91.3
Does not have electricity in household	8.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>

In comparison to the busier districts of *El Boulevard* and *Primera Calle*, the riverfront neighborhoods of Choluteca are quiet and tranquil. *Barrio Morazán*, to the northeast of *Barrio El Centro*, for example, is stretched out over several blocks of winding and interconnected dirt streets. During daytime hours doors and windows are left open for the river breeze to blow through adobe, *bajareque*, and brick houses alike. Fruit and shade trees provide a respite from the hot sun, and radios can be heard from the inside of houses as one walks by. *Pulperias*, family stores that sell everything from frozen chicken to batteries and popsicles, are the centers of activity, with children and adolescents leaning on open doorways, waiting to complete their latest errand. Homes are

painted in the customary two-tone pattern, with contrasting colors dividing the walls of houses into lower and upper halves. Dogs, chickens, and pigs walk around loose but are not a nuisance, and the occasional pick-up truck delivering supplies to the *pulperías* makes its way through the narrow streets.

Other neighborhoods, like *Los Mangos*, also to the northeast of the town center, feature a greater proportion of more affluent households. Unlike the homes of *Morazán*, whose front doors lead directly to the street or to unfenced yards, some houses in *Los Mangos* have small ornamental gardens closed in by low cement walls with metal bars and electric doorbells, creating a feeling similar to the middle class suburbs of larger Honduran cities like Tegucigalpa. Still, the pattern does not hold throughout the entire neighborhood, and the more cloistered and austere houses eventually give way to residences that resemble those of *Morazán*. These have open yards with shady trees, wooden benches, and domestic animals walking around. Finally, *Barrio La Cruz*, directly to the North of *Barrio El Centro* and adjacent to the western edge of *Barrio Los Mangos* presents another face of Choluteca's centric neighborhoods. Houses in *Barrio La Cruz* are built in a contiguous arrangement, with no yards between them and facades with metal doors that lead directly to paved streets. Mixed in with these recent structures are older wooden and adobe houses.

At the northern edge of the riverfront neighborhoods are the ruins of houses that were swept away during the hurricane. In some cases, single walls remain standing, partially buried by river mud, while in others only the lower third of a destroyed house remains, and the soil sediments that were brought by the river have provided a place for grass and weeds to grow. Some of the neighborhoods towards the western edge of the

river's shore were completely destroyed. This was the case of *Brisas del Rio*, where little remained after the storm, giving this devastated area the look of a peaceful grassland. *Brisas del Rio*, however, did not remain uninhabited, and several families had built expanded shanties at the time of this ethnography.

The Reconstruction Communities

On the corner of *Primera Calle*, by the giant Electra appliance store and the pool halls and cantinas, is a popular stop for two bus routes that appeared several months after the passing of Hurricane Mitch. The converted school busses that stop by this busy intersection every twenty minutes or so have one of two names written above their windshields: Marcelino Champagnat or Ciudad Nueva. Both of these are postdisaster reconstruction communities settled primarily by former Choluteca residents who lost their houses in October of 1998. The communities are both located roughly 7 kilometers away from Choluteca, along the Panamerican Highway, which connects with *El Boulevard* at the town's western extreme. Ciudad Nueva is one of the many names Limón de la Cerca goes by in Choluteca. It is also known as Ciudad Naciones Unidas, or, as its residents call it, simply *El Limón*.

The bus ride from the center of Choluteca to the bus terminal in *Limón* takes between 35 and 45 minutes to complete. Taking Choluteca's main boulevard, the bus passes residential and business areas, fruit vendors, health department offices and a police station before leaving behind the core of the town's urban area. As the bus travels in a northeasterly direction, houses and businesses become scarce and the tropical savannah of the southern lowlands begins to take over. Limón de la Cerca and Marcelino Champagnat are located on a semiarid plain where vegetation is limited to low shrubs and

chains of low mountains on the northern, eastern and southern sides of the area create a framing effect. Because of Choluteca's mixture of coastal and savannah type environment, the plain is hot and dusty, and, occasionally, strong winds turn into small and powerful tornado-like funnels.

Limón de la Cerca and Marcelino Champagnat are located on opposite sides of the highway, with Limón being on the northern side. Marcelino is also slightly separated from Limón, as it is about 200 meters closer to Choluteca along the highway (Figure 3-2). During the time of this ethnography (July 2000-August 2001), Limón de la Cerca was a community of 4,000 residents who lived in 904 households (Matus et al. 2000). Limón de la Cerca was settled in early 1999 through a land invasion by a group of prehurricane neighborhood leaders and families displaced by Hurricane Mitch. Several months after this first settlement, a group of community leaders and residents seceded from Limón de la Cerca and founded Marcelino Champagnat across the highway. The particular details of the founding of these two communities are reviewed in detail in Chapter 4.

Limón de la Cerca

By July of 2000 a total of 1200 homes had been constructed in Limón through the collaborative efforts of several international donors and community residents. The donors included religious and secular nongovernmental organizations (NGO) like Atlas Logistique and Samarian's Purse, as well as smaller organizations like independent North American church groups. The United States Agency for International Development provided funds for home construction programs, which were channeled through Samaritan's Purse, and water and sewage programs that were carried out by national contractors.

Of the 1200 homes that were constructed, 965 followed a single 25 m² design. The majority of these houses had tin roofs and wooden doors, although some houses were outfitted with metal doors. The remaining 235 houses were built using a slightly larger design using internal partitions providing two bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen. All homes were constructed on 200 m² land parcels. These land parcels had 10 m street side fronts and were 20 m in depth. These dimensions placed houses in close contiguity to one another. According to the community health center's 2001 census, 300 of the 1200 constructed homes remained vacant during the period of this ethnography (Matus et al. 2000).

The reconstruction site is divided into 8 *colonias* (subdivisions) that are named after donor agencies, donor countries, private donors, and prominent religious figures. Each *colonia* is politically represented by a president and a development committee that negotiate assistance and development projects with the local government and donor agencies. The names of these *colonias* and some of their basic demographic indicators are listed in table 3-5.

At the time of this ethnography personal investments by community residents in housing improvements were limited. Most houses remained without ornamental plaster and unpainted (Figure 3-3). Shade trees, although planted by residents, had not grown to provide significant cover and only a handful of households had managed to construct small additions in the form of porches or new rooms. The community's streets remained without paving and some of them became impassable by car during the peak of the rainy season (Figure 3-4). During the rainy season uninhabited land parcels were filled with overgrown grass and ditches were filled with stagnant water and refuse (Figure 3-5). In



Figure 3-3. Houses without plaster.



Figure 3-4. Limón de la Cerca in the rainy season.

contrast, during the dry season the dirt streets and empty land parcels were scorched by the sun, and topsoil became loose dust that was easily lifted by the plain's strong winds.



Figure 3-5. Garbage collected in a drainage ditch.

To the newcomer, the bare cinder block tin roofed houses, the sparse tree shade and the alternation between dusty and muddy streets of Limón made a strong contrast with Choluteca's riverfront neighborhoods, with the former giving the impression of a harsh and inhospitable environment.

Viewed from above, Limón was constructed roughly following a pentagonal layout (Figure 3-6). In relation to the Panamerican Highway, Limón stretches over 600 meters along this major road, and extends 1.26 km in a northerly direction away from the

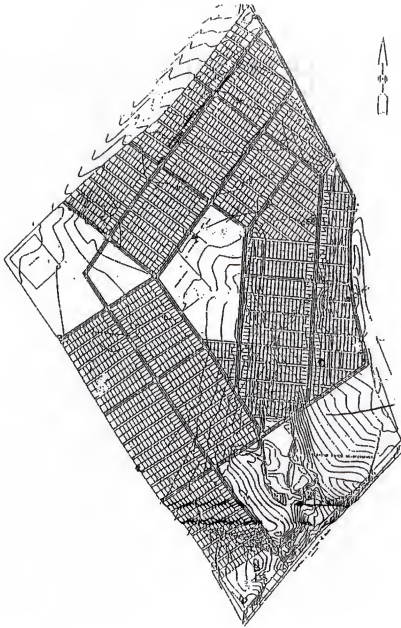


Figure 3-6. Map of Limón de la Cerca. Source: Ciudad Nueva, Centro de Salud.

highway. The center of the site features another smaller asymmetrical pentagonal area that was set aside for the construction of schools, clinics, provisional NGO offices and a stage for public events called *El Plantel*. *El Plantel*, which is located on the western point

of the public pentagonal area, is surrounded by a chain link fence, providing a location where assistance agencies kept materials and set up offices. During the period of this study, Samaritan's Purse was the primary occupant of the *Plantel*, using the site as a staging area for community development projects and public relations events. Adjacent to *El Plantel* is a small wooden structure similar to those of snack vendors in *El Boulevard*, where a community resident prepared and sold meals to NGO workers, health staff, and bus and truck drivers. Because of its specific clientele, this small diner became an important location for unstructured ethnographic interviews.

Table 3-5 List of eight *colonias* of Limón de la Cerca.

<u>Colonia</u>	<u>Population</u>
Panamericana	323
Samaritana	564
Nueva Jerusalén	580
Santa Fe	476
Loma Linda	366
Juan Pablo Segundo	545
Linda Henry	442
Francesa	868
<i>Total</i>	<i>4164</i>

Across the street from the diner is another community landmark. This is the Limón bus terminal *pulperia* and billiards, a place where bus drivers play pool and foosball, and drink refreshments between their turns driving the Choluteca-Limón route. Because it was the principal point of departure for Limón residents traveling to Choluteca on business and because its billiards provided one of the few adult recreational areas in the reconstruction site, the terminal *pulperia* was an important location for small, informal public gatherings, and the sharing of news among community residents. In addition to the bus terminal *pulperia*, several other small family stores were also

gathering places for community residents, and there was a second household that acquired a pool table and sold alcoholic and non alcoholic drinks in Limón.

Daily life in Limón de la Cerca revolves around the occupational and housekeeping activities of residents. Tables 3-6 and 3-7 list the occupations reported by male and female community residents during household nutritional surveys. These tables should demonstrate that Limón residents are involved in a variety of occupations.

Table 3-6 Occupations of Limon de la Cerca, Marcelino Champagnat and Choluteca female survey respondents.

<i>Occupation</i>	Limon de la Cerca		Marcelino Champagnat		Choluteca	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Housekeeper	61	55.4	31	63.3	41	59.4
Maid	20	18.2	1	2.0	1	1.4
Tortilla vendor	6	5.4	-	-	2	2.9
Food vendor	6	5.4	5	10.2	4	7.2
Laundry maid	4	3.6	3	6.1	7	10.1
Pulperia	4	3.6	2	2.0	2	2.9
Merchant	3	2.7	2	4.1	1	1.4
Cashier	1	.9	-	-	-	-
Nurse	1	.9	-	-	-	-
Dental Mech.	1	.9	-	-	-	-
Maize grinding	-	-	1	2.0	-	-
Concierge	-	-	1	2.0	-	-
Shrimp Industry	-	-	1	2.0	-	-
Midwife	-	-	1	2.0	1	1.4
Street sweeper	-	-	-	-	1	1.4
Rents rooms	-	-	-	-	1	1.4
Seamstress	-	-	-	-	3	4.2
Teacher	-	-	-	-	2	2.9
Secretary	-	-	-	-	1	1.4
Student	-	-	1	2.0	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	2	2.9
None	3	2.7	1	2.0	2	2.0

Placing the residents of Limón de la Cerca in the bigger picture of southern Honduras, tables 3-6 and 3-7 show that they are a population involved in a variety of occupations related to Choluteca's urban economy. The most popular occupation among

Table 3-7 Occupations of adult male partners or nearest of kin for survey respondents in Limón de la Cerca, Marcelino Champagnat and Choluteca.

<i>Occupation</i>	Limon de la Cerca		Marcelino Champagnat		Choluteca	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Construction worker	30	27.0	14	26.5	10	14
Driver (taxi/truck)	9	8.1	5	10.2	10	14.0
Guard	7	6.3	2	4.1	1	1.4
Agricultural laborer	6	5.4	2	4.1	5	7.2
Food vendor	6	5.4	4	8.2	-	-
Mechanic	5	4.5	2	4.1	4	5.8
Ambulatory sales	4	3.6	-	-	-	-
Carpenter	3	2.7	-	-	3	4.3
Butcher	2	1.8	-	-	-	-
Merchant	2	1.8	-	-	7	10.1
Electrician	2	1.8	1	2.0	2	2.9
Student	1	.9	-	-	2	2.9
Sugar laborer	1	.9	-	-	-	-
Gasoline attendant	1	.9	-	-	1	1.4
Truck loader	1	.9	1	2.0	1	1.4
Plumber	1	.9	-	-	-	-
Brick maker	1	.9	-	-	-	-
Baker	1	.9	-	-	-	-
Fisherman	1	.9	-	-	-	-
Cobbler	1	.9	1	2.0	-	-
Janitor	1	.9	1	2.0	-	-
Health promoter	1	.9	-	-	-	-
Dental mechanic	-	-	1	2.0	-	-
Welder	-	-	1	2.0	1	1.4
Technician	-	-	2	4.1	2	2.9
Accountant	-	-	-	-	4	5.8
Teacher	-	-	-	-	1	1.4
Policeman	-	-	-	-	2	2.9
Other	5	4.5	3	6.1	8	11.6
None	1	.9	-	-	2	2.9
Cases with no						
Adult male resident	15	13.5	8	16.3	-	-

male heads of household is construction work, which is listed by the Cholutecan

municipality as one of the city's primary industries and sources of employment, while

female heads of household provide a number of services for the town's residential areas ranging from the sale of tortillas to the cleaning of houses and sale of fast foods.

Although I will argue in subsequent chapters that the residents of Limón de la Cerca were a population facing severe social, political, and material hardships between 2000 and 2001, I hesitate to label them as urban poor, as such as categorization strips away many of their important capacities and resources. At the same time, I do not claim that Limón was an affluent community during the period of my study. As I hope to show in the ethnography that follows, scarcity- of resources, safety, income, and employment opportunities- was an element of life in the reconstruction community that residents contended with on a day to day basis, but this scarcity was, in some cases a newly found condition that emerged from the process of community reconstruction. In other cases, scarcity was not a newly found condition, as some households lived in conditions of poverty prior to the hurricane, and found such a condition exacerbated by life in the reconstruction site.

Most importantly, the term urban poor, seems to obscure more than it illuminates by leveling the intricate pattern of differences between community residents onto a community wide mean (Ferguson 1999) of "poor" and suggests that the condition of poverty is an internal property of disaster survivors that enjoys a position as causal factor in the making of a crisis in disaster reconstruction. Through the collection of personal histories during this ethnography, I learned that a single categorization of Limón's residents as urban poor glossed over differences in household resources, lifestyles, and practices that varied from one home to the next. In some cases Limón residents were owners of multiple residential properties in Choluteca prior to the hurricane, in others,

they were former small-scale entrepreneurs that made a living from the preparation and sale of fast foods, and, in others, were agricultural laborers that subsisted from minimal and seasonally-varying wage earnings.

Taking these comments into consideration I present table 3-8, which summarizes indicators of household wealth as measured through a 12 item material style of life index in Limón de la Cerca, Marcelino Champagnat and the hurricane affected neighborhoods of Choluteca. What the table demonstrates is that, in comparison to the two other research sites, Limón de la Cerca households possessed less commodities, and, by extrapolation, were less wealthy than those of Choluteca or Marcelino. The table also shows average household dependency ratios for the three research sites which were calculated by dividing the number of household residents younger than 16 years of age by those older than 16 years of age.

Table 3-8 Comparison of material style of life index (MSL) and dependency ratio (D.R.= $\frac{\leq 16}{>16}$) means by research site.

<u>Research Site</u>	<u>MSL</u>	<u>D.R.</u>	<u>N</u>
Choluteca neighborhoods	3.82	1.08	70
Marcelino Champagnat	2.49	1.58	50
Limon de la Cerca	1.67	1.51	111
<i>One-way ANOVA</i>	<i>P=.000</i>	<i>P=.002</i>	

This discussion of social life in Limón de la Cerca would be incomplete without mentioning the local chapter of the *Mara Salvatrucha*, one of the two major transnational street gangs of Central America. In 2000, the Honduran Preventive Police estimated street gang membership at 34,202 members belonging to 397 chapters throughout the country (Andino Mencias 2002) Twenty two of these 397 chapters were based in Choluteca, accounting for 5.5% of all chapters in the country. According to local police

and municipality estimates, *mara* (street gang) membership increased from 35 known members to over 500 in the town of Choluteca from November 1998 to December of 2000 (Fieldnotes 2000).

The nature of Honduran *maras* ranges from small and harmless groups of homeless adolescents to large and extremely violent transnational communities. The *Mara Mercedes Loca* of Tegucigalpa, for example, had a membership of roughly a dozen members, all less than 20 years of age, with most ranging between 10 and 15 years of age during 2001. All of its members were engaged in some form of substance abuse ranging from the sniffing of shoe cobbler's glue to the smoking of crack cocaine, and their activities were limited to begging for money and loitering in the plaza of the national congress. *Mara Salvatrucha* and *Mara 18*, in contrast, had thousands of members whose ages ranged from young adolescence to over 30 years of age, some of its members were former members of the national army, were armed with homemade and automatic rifles, and were popularized in their national press for their gruesome collective murders and intimidation of entire neighborhoods cities like Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula and Choluteca.

In Limón de la Cerca, *Mara Salvatrucha* was ubiquitous during the period of ethnographic study, and it made its presence known in the form of stories told by residents about nighttime assaults and gang warfare, graffiti on the walls of houses and the publicity signs of donor agencies, and the tattooed bodies of shirtless adolescents (Figure 3-7). Because of the way that the *mara* capitalized, both consciously and inadvertently, on these multiple forms of media, it eventually surpassed nongovernmental

organizations and *colonia* development committees as the most influential organization in the daily lives of community residents. The *maras* are an important element in this ethnography because the types of relationships they mediated with the two reconstruction communities of Limón de la Cerca and Marcelino Champagnat were telling signs of the effects of different reconstruction practices in these two localities. As I will show in the chapters that follow, the specification of certain arrangements of reconstruction aid and disaster survivors in Limón de la Cerca created a locality where *mara* membership proliferated and certain relationships between *mareros* and residents that were not plausible under previous circumstances became possible. Alternatively, although there were *mara* members living in Marcelino Champagnat in 2000, the relationship that gang members and residents shared was of a different nature. In Limón de la Cerca *mareros* operated with impunity, especially at nighttime hours, intimidating residents and painting graffiti on community landmarks. In Marcelino Champagnat there was no public *mara* graffiti at the time of this study, and the community's council members and residents had mediated a relationship with *mareros* that were advantageous to the former. The details of these relationships, and the *mara* agency-enabling role of reconstruction practices in Limón de la Cerca will be reviewed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Marcelino Champagnat

Marcelino Champagnat is a post-Mitch reconstruction community located approximately 200 meters away from Limón de la Cerca along the Panamerican Highway. In the period of 2000-2001 Marcelino had 1,100 residents, living in 330 homes. This community was founded by former Limón de la Cerca residents and

neighborhood leaders that seceded from the larger reconstruction site in 1999. The details of this secession are presented in chapter 4.



Figure 3-7. Non-governmental organization (NGO) sign with painted *Mara Salvatrucha* gang logo.

Despite their common origins, Marcelino Champagnat featured dramatic differences from its parent community in the way reconstruction assistance was distributed and the types of relationships that developed among residents and between residents and aid agencies. Unlike Limón de la Cerca, Marcelino Champagnat featured electric power and public lighting at the time fieldwork was initiated. Land parcels were twice as large, measuring 400 m². Houses constructed through aid programs were also larger (250 homes had 48 m² floor plans, and 80 had 35 m² floor plans), featured internal partitions for better distribution of living spaces, and featured plastered and painted facades. While Limón de la Cerca houses seemed to follow a pattern where donors

expected residents to maximize the benefits of minimal investments (single room 25 m² homes, 200 m² land parcels), Marcelino seemed to provide an example of a locality where residents were presented with worthwhile investments (multiple room 35 and 48 m² floor plans, 400 m² land parcels) as one of the fundamental elements of community reconstruction.

Like Limón, Marcelino had an elementary school and a community health center operated by public health department staff. Additionally, Marcelino had an indoor hall for community activities that was under the administrative charge of the community's governing structure. Rather than being divided into several *colonias* with development committees and presidents, Marcelino was organized under a single *patronato* that was composed of several committees including a water committee, a women's committee, and a health committee.

Tables 3-6 and 3-7 show that the occupations of Marcelino residents do not differ dramatically from those of Limón residents, although Marcelino households did report a significantly greater amount of commodities as part of their household wealth (table 3-8). Daily life in Marcelino is similar to Limón in some respects and activity outside households took place primarily in the areas surrounding family-owned *pulperias*.

Walking through Marcelino's hilly streets, the cumulative effect of the differences in housing styles and aid distribution with Limón were hard to ignore in July of 2000. There was no visible *mara* graffiti on the walls of houses or public structures, many families had planted banana and other fruit trees in their *solares* (land parcels), the larger *solares* allowed for a spacing out of housing structures that did not seem as crowded as

that of Limón, and the installation of public lighting permitted neighbors and visitors to leave their houses at night with some degree of safety.

Research Methods

Ethnographic research for this ethnography was conducted at three primary locations including Limón de la Cerca, Marcelino Champagnat, and 9 hurricane affected riverfront neighborhoods of Choluteca. Additional research was also conducted in the offices of national and international nongovernmental organizations involved in the reconstruction of Choluteca, and the Cholutecan municipality offices. Research at the three primary locations involved the completion of 230 household nutritional surveys (Limón de la Cerca N=111, Marcelino Champagnat N=50, Hurricane affected neighborhoods N=70), the collection of anthropometric measures for one child under five years of age in each of the 230 survey households, the completion of 40 focused ethnographic interviews with Limón de la Cerca residents, informal ethnographic interviews conducted with community residents aid agency workers and community health center staff at all three primary research sites, and participant observation. All surveys, interviews, and participant observation were carried out between July 16, 2000 and August 1, 2001. Funding for research was provided by the National Science Foundation (James P. Stansbury, principal investigator) and Fulbright International Programs. Prior research in Limón de la Cerca was conducted in July and August of 1999 with funds provided by the Hurricane Research Center of Florida International University.

Nutritional surveys in Limón de la Cerca were completed between July 16 and October 1, 2000. In Marcelino Champagnat, surveys were conducted between February

12 and March 1 of 2001, and surveys in the hurricane-affected neighborhoods of Choluteca were completed between May 23 and June 30 of 2001. Focused ethnographic interviews with Limón de la Cerca residents were completed between November 13 and April 30 2001. Participant observation and informal ethnographic interviews were conducted throughout the period of this study.

A copy of the nutritional survey instrument used in this study is included under appendix A. Nutritional surveys were completed at the three primary research sites with the intention of determining the long term nutritional and health effects of disaster reconstruction. Limón de la Cerca was chosen as the research site of primary interest, riverfront hurricane affected neighborhoods of Choluteca were chosen as a control group for the comparison of the effects of resettlement, and Marcelino Champagnat as an additional control for the effects of different reconstruction practices. The instrument included household demographic information, a material style of life index, general information concerning housing conditions and construction materials, a 7 day household recall of purchased and consumed foods, a 24 hour household recall of prepared and consumed foods, an individual 24hr dietary recall for a child under five years of age and a female caretaker, a questionnaire concerning acute respiratory infections, febrile illness and diarrhea for the focal child, and anthropometric measures (weight, height, triceps skinfold, subscapular skinfold, mid upper arm diameter) for the focal child.

In Limón de la Cerca and Marcelino Champagnat surveyed households were chosen using community maps provided by their respective health centers. Households shown on maps were assigned numbers, and these numbers were used to select interview locations through a random number generator included in the Centers for Disease Control

software package Epi Info. For the hurricane-affected neighborhoods of Choluluteca, households were selected using neighborhood maps provided by the municipality. These maps were modified to account for hurricane damages, and new housing structures were noted and included when necessary. Households shown on maps were assigned numbers and selected using Epi Info's random number generator. Additional alternative household numbers were chosen in all cases to account for those homes that were either vacant, did not have a child under 5 years of age, or refused to participate in the study. Only 2 of 230 households chose not to participate. Oral informed consent was obtained in all cases, and the research protocol was approved by the University of Florida's Institutional Review Board (UFIRB 2000-U-860, UFIRB 2003-U-638). Survey results were entered in Excel and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software.

Appendix B shows a list of ethnographic questions used to complete 40 focused interviews with Limón de la Cerca residents. The interview questions were designed to elicit responses from disaster survivors concerning the changes in their lives experienced as a result of the reconstruction process. The 40 interviewees were chosen randomly from the list of 111 Limón de la Cerca nutritional survey respondents. Interviews were recorded on microcassettes and transcribed. The names of all interview participants were substituted with pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

The analysis of these interviews favored content over quantification. This means that interviews were reviewed and coded for the presence of reconstruction related themes, but, rather than relying on the quantification of these themes as an analytical, interviews were selected for inclusion in this ethnography on the basis of how they demonstrated the articulation of reconstruction practices and policies, the imagining of

desirable community life by disaster survivors, and the mundane realities of life in the reconstruction site. The emphasis on the latter stems from my opinion that the themes discussed in each individual interview are more informative when considered within the complex contextual framework of each narrator's experiences. Furthermore, the amalgamation of interview contents into broader, quantifiable thematic categories would create a series of translations that erase much of the informative particularities of these interviews and create a sense of generic equivalence from one narration to another that is disputed by the very words of interview respondents. Additionally, such numerical reporting fails to account for the mediational emergence of these themes through my interactions with interview respondents.

In addition to the structured ethnographic interviews with Limón de la Cerca residents, structured and semi-structured ethnographic interviews were completed with aid agency workers and managers, community leaders and local government officials. These included interviews with Limón de la Cerca *colonia* presidents and community organizers, NGO project managers in both Limón de la Cerca and Marcelino Champagnat, international NGO volunteers, health department staff, the town mayor, municipality workers and office managers. The information gathered from these interviews was preserved in the form of fieldnotes. In the course of these ethnographic interviews, a number of documents including institutional reports, budgets, official communications, and public relations brochures were collected. I find it important to note that in the course of writing this ethnography these documents became an investigative location just as important as the modest living rooms of Limón residents for the examination of disaster reconstruction in Southern Honduras. These locations enabled a

type of research that called attention to the role of representation in the making of institutional realities, and permitted the juxtaposition of these realities to the experiences of community residents. This juxtaposition allowed for the systematic, and hopefully illuminating, examination of the role of the politics of knowledge in the creation of incongruencies between program objectives and disaster survivor realities and desires. Having reviewed the locations of research and methods applied in the completion of this ethnographic, we now turn to a review of the reconstruction encounter as it unfolded in Choluteca from 1999 to 2001.

CHAPTER 4

REPRESENTATIONS OF COMMUNITY AND VICTIMHOOD IN DISASTER RECONSTRUCTION

In late July of 2000 I met Antonio Tovar, another ethnographer from the University of Florida, in Tegucigalpa, the capital city of Honduras. Three weeks had passed since we had arrived to work on a post-disaster nutritional study directed by James P. Stansbury. Our first task was to help finalize a nutrition survey, and we were meeting in the capital city to discuss how the instrument had worked during a two-week pilot study. On a weekend night, Antonio and I decided to visit what we were told was a popular venue. The recommendation was a good one, *La Mina*, as the bar was called, was not only teeming with Honduran artists, writers and musicians, but also a few reconstruction NGO workers.

With a little ethnographer's luck we met an International Migration Organization (IMO) consultant who had recently visited Limón de la Cerca. When I mentioned that I had chosen this reconstruction community as the location for my dissertation fieldwork he quickly asked: "Well, what did you think of it?"

The simple question was not easy to answer. I first visited Limón de la Cerca in 1999 to collect anthropometric data for a pilot study funded by the International Hurricane Center of Florida International University. Nine months after the hurricane it was difficult to tell what the future held in store for this nascent community. Most families were living in IMO-constructed *micros* (short for *microalbergue*, a particle board 25 m² structure, see figure 4-1) tents and makeshift shanties. Approximately 200 meters away,

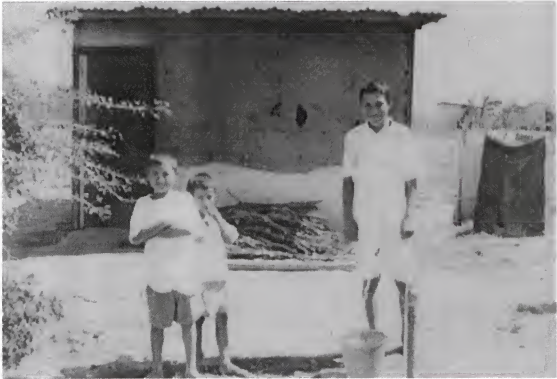


Figure 4-1. Limón de la Cerca residents standing in front of their *micro*.

across the Pan-American Highway, I found another group of disaster survivors who had recently decided to establish their own reconstruction community. The condition of these former Limón de la Cerca residents was a difficult one. Not a single *micro* was present, and most families lived in *conos* (conical tents), donated by an international assistance agency. The heavy July rains had softened the ground, and mud and stagnant water filled the landscape.

Having only one week to collect the height and weight measures of 96 infants in a door to door survey, it was impossible to fully grasp the complexity of the interactions among *damnificados*, the municipal government, and national and international assistance agencies that were taking place. The results of our anthropometric study (Barrios et al. 2000, table 7-1) suggested that the population of Limón de la Cerca was experiencing a nutritional crisis. Still, it would require a prolonged field experience to

reveal that the problem went well beyond the physiological repercussions of protein-energy or chronic malnutrition, and that the conditions confronted by Limón residents were an effect of a broader process of marginalization that resulted from the resettlement and reconstruction of Choluteca. This outcome was not inevitable, and dramatically different interactions between similar players in nearby communities were producing different results.

In July 2000 I encountered a very different scene where Limón de la Cerca stood. There were notable improvements in housing. Twelve hundred houses had been built, the majority of which followed a tin-roofed, single room, 25 m² design (with the exception of 235 four room 35 m² homes constructed by the French company Atlas Logistique). The community health center that was once a tent surrounded by mud and puddles was now a brick structure complete with an individual water reservoir and multiple examination rooms. A few meters east of the health center was a new elementary school, and a middle school was under construction.

Despite these improvements, there were signs of trouble in the community. Some of the signs came in the visible form of Mara Salvatrucha graffiti (figure 4-2) painted on houses and NGO billboards meant to welcome visitors to the community. Other signs of trouble came in the form of three hundred vacant housing structures, some of which had lost their roofs to strong winds or human hands (Figure 4-3). Other less visible but more telling signs came in the form of an electrification project that remained without completion despite the allocation of sufficient funds by the Norwegian and Japanese governments (Figure 4-4). The lack of public lighting made Limón de la Cerca renown as a place of nighttime assaults and robberies among Choluteca residents.



Figure 4-2. Street-gang graffiti on house.



Figure 4-3 Wind-damaged house.



Figure 4-4. Electricity pole with no wiring.

Within visible distance on the opposite side of the Pan-American Highway was the same population I had encountered a year earlier. This time, the *conos* were gone, replaced with 35 and 40 m² floor plan homes (Figure 4-5). The houses were situated in house lots twice as large as those of Limón de la Cerca (200 m²) and the community's dirt streets were lighted by what some claimed was the best electrification project in Southern Honduras. A humble painted metal sign displayed the name of the new community: "Marcelino Champagnat"(Figure 4-6).

My response to the IOM consultant's question did not honor the complexity of the problem: "I think it's a shame that there's still no electricity in the community, it's putting people's lives at risk. Look at Marcelino Champagnat, they have this great



Figure 4-5. House in Marcelino Champagnat.



Figure 4-6. Marcelino Champagnat community sign.

electrification project, the house lots are twice as large, there's no *mara* graffiti..."

Displeased with my answer, the consultant replied: "Do you think electricity would solve the problems of Limón de la Cerca? Those people came from the marginal neighborhoods of Choluteca, places full of delinquency, the people of Marcelino came from rural areas, with a different history of organizing, that's why they're so different" (Fieldnotes 2001).

A few days later the University of Florida research team met at the offices of a major national social science research institution. As a formality we were presenting our nutrition survey to one of the directors. Antonio Tovar had gone to great lengths to compile an exhaustive list of foods eaten by Hondurans, which served as the basis for a seven-day dietary recall instrument. Upon reviewing the survey, the assistant director told us that our work, although thorough, was a waste of time. Certainly the residents of the *macroalbergues* (large temporary resettlement camps) did not have such varied diets. The foods they ate, we were informed, were limited to bread and coffee, or, as the director put it, *comida de putas* (whore's food).

Several months later, at the United States Ambassador to Honduras' Christmas party I found myself in a conversation with a member of USAID's public relations staff. Upon mentioning my research interests in Southern Honduras, the staff member told me she had recently visited Choluteca to survey the results of several AID reconstruction projects. My interest was immediately piqued and I requested a copy of any documents she could share that detailed AID's hurricane reconstruction activities. Several weeks later, after several email exchanges, she provided me with such a document: a meticulously prepared itemized budget (Figure 4-7).

USAID/HONDURAS
HURRICANE RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM (HRP)
QUARTERLY FINANCIAL INFORMATION
(US\$ 000)

Component Number	Program Description	Obligations	Cumulative Commitments as of 03/31/01
41000	HRP/RECAP Budget CY2000		48,000
	Activity Management		0
	USPS Contracts		0
	Evaluation and Audits		0
	Uncommitted Balance		100
41000	HRP/RECAP Budget CY2000		48,000
	Agricultural Credit and Technologies		51,880
	Credit-Fonaprovi/MOF/P.Banks		14,986
	Barents/Carana Design		1,832
	Facach		6,000
	ACDI/Finacoop		5,000
	Fundacion Covelo		7,139
	Katalysis/Fama		861
	FHIA		3,160
	Escuela Agricola Panamericana (EPA)		5,902
	Land O'Lakes		3,000
	FINTRAC		4,000
	Policy		2,999
	Chemionics Intl. Inc.		2,999
	Project Management/Other		715
	Uncommitted Balance		406

Figure 4-7. Unites States Agency for International Development budget. Source: USAID.

Semiotic analyses in the anthropology of disaster reconstruction involve more than the gratuitous critique of comments made by institutional actors in moments of candor. The reason I include these anecdotes as an introduction to the ethnography of Limón de

la Cerca is because they provide a montage that is illustrative of the challenges that I confronted as a social scientist coming to terms with the multiple and sometimes conflicting representations of *damnificados* that circulated in institutional reports, neighborhood gossip, disaster survivor narratives, and anthropological methodologies during the reconstruction of Southern Honduras. These representations appeared in the form of public relations documents, institutional budgets, derogatory comments, and statistical analyses. In contrast, the narratives of Limón residents concerning the process of disaster reconstruction in Choluteca routinely resisted their reduction to any neatly delimited category, and often contested institutional evaluation results that claimed the reconstruction of Southern Honduras was proceeding in a successful fashion.

For this reason, I find it important to emphasize that these anecdotes are not meant to be a disparaging denouncement of those reconstruction actors that were so kind as to invite me into their offices and share their thoughts and documents concerning the reconstruction of Limón. Additionally, these anecdotes are not intended to suggest that, as an anthropologist, I had a certain omniscience that permitted me to know the *damnificados* of Limón de la Cerca as a cultural whole better than other reconstruction actors. What I hope to accomplish is to point to a critical problem in the relationship between knowledge, representation, experience, and reconstruction practice that was pervasive in Choluteca at the time of this ethnography.

I call this a critical problem because, for the purposes of this ethnography, representation does not refer to a singular description of a prediscursive reality that can be objectively captured through language. Instead, representation is used to denote a process by which objects are ontologically and materially constituted. This is a system of

regulatory ideals that produces the objects we make knowledge about and that delimits the kinds of knowledge we make about them (Butler 1993, Ferguson 1999, Foucault 1970). The language of description, in any one specific location, is not a neutral epistemological resource. It is a cultural product, with a history and a semiotics. Most importantly, these representations, which include scientific objects of inquiry like children's growth measures as well as photographic renderings, attain a status as real in the process of narration, simplifying the irreducible, omitting radical contestations, and making alternative claims (like those of *damnificados* which I am about to present) inaudible.

I also call this a critical problem because the reconstruction of Limón de la Cerca was a process where some representations of community and disaster survivors (itemized budgets, municipality annual reports, nutritional epidemiology) were valued over others (resident requests for different housing design and land distribution patterns) in the making of assistance policy decisions. At the same time, in their response to ethnographic questions about disaster recovery, community residents articulated a number of objections to reconstruction practices in this locality that were nowhere present in these reports, tables, and budgets.

The representations that I am concerned with relied on a mechanism of signification in which disaster victims emerged as the embodiment of the bolded elements in a series of essentialized dichotomies (**urban**/rural, autonomous/**dependent**, **fiscal**/anecdotal, trustworthy/**delinquent**, central/**marginal**, donor/**beneficiary**, mother/**whore**). These significations, in turn, repeatedly surfaced in the ways aid agency workers and program managers conceived disaster survivors, influencing key decisions of reconstruction

practice and resource distribution. For this reason, I insist that this dissertation is deeply concerned with performative materiality and not merely the linguistic or ideological.

The consultant's reply, the staff member's budget, and the director's comment synthesize a number of theoretical and practical concerns that are central to this ethnography. First among these is the role that institutional epistemes play in creating knowledge about the populations they assist and how this knowledge relates to reconstruction practice. Second is what kinds of material, relational, and ontological conditions such relationships produce. The third is how this knowledge, practice, and materiality correlates or not with the experiences and subjectivities of beneficiary populations.

These three concerns could be reworded by asking: How did institutional representations of disaster survivors circulate in the reconstruction encounter of Limón de la Cerca? What kinds of agencies did such representations enhance in their circulation? And what role did they play in producing material conditions and arrangements of people and resources that precipitated a condition of crisis?

To understand the performative processes through which Limón de la Cerca emerged as a community mired by social crisis and the stigma of marginality it is necessary to approach the reconstruction encounter in Choluteca as an irreducible object of ethnographic inquiry. By irreducible I mean that it is not sufficient to state that Limón's material realities were shaped by the teleological imposition of certain ideas about the nature of Honduran communities and disaster survivors on the part of reconstruction program managers. It is also not sufficient to say that Limón de la Cerca was the unavoidable product of a modern discourse of reconstruction or development.

Instead, following a methodology loosely based on the actor-network approach (Latour 1988, Law 1992, Pickering 1995), it is essential to capture those moments of practice when multiple actors with their desires, representations, imaginings, and notions of body politics engaged with one another after the passing of Hurricane Mitch with the intention of reconstructing Southern Honduras. Furthermore it is necessary to indicate when and how, in the midst of this actor-network, reconstruction actors like community leaders and NGO architects made decisions as to how to proceed in the reconstruction of Choluteca on the basis of their imaginings of economic natures, the aesthetics of international assistance, and the body politics of disaster survivors and their communities.

In cases like the distribution of land parcels and design of housing units in Limón, the ideas upon which these decisions were made were contested by disaster survivors and their leaders, but discourses of body politics became powerful allies for reconstruction actors who differed in their imagining of reconstruction practice. In these cases, decisions that negated the value of *damnificado* notions of home and community or that inhibited the transformation of reconstruction aid into commensurable forms of reconstruction had dire consequences like the proliferation of street gangs, the abandonment of housing structures, and the ripping away of rooftops by strong winds.

The irreducibility of the reconstruction encounter implies that the model for understanding the emergence of crisis in Limón de la Cerca is fluid, dynamic, and composed of multiple actors and forces. In this model reconstruction actors cannot be neatly encased as the embodiment of a singular discourse, although their experiences, politics, and subjectivities allow some discourses and narratives of transcendence to resonate more than others. In this chapter I use three primary types of evidence to

illustrate the workings and ramifications of this model. These are 1) composite narratives which summarize ethnographic information recorded in more than 100 fieldnote entries 2) transcription excerpts from 40 interviews conducted with community members and leaders, and 3) field note excerpts from ethnographic interviews conducted with reconstruction program managers.

Knowing the *Damnificados*: Overcoming the Challenges of Representation and the Desire for Empirical Omniscience in the Ethnography of Reconstruction

I begin this ethnography with a simple query: Who exactly are the *damnificados*, the people living under conditions of vulnerability that became the charge of the Cholutecan municipality and countless assistance agencies after the hurricane? Additionally, to what degree do the representations of institutional reports and narrative tropes of reconstruction actors capture the subjectivities and positionings of Limón residents? This question is important because throughout this ethnographic research the *damnificados* were continuously figured at the center of explanations for the community's social and material conditions.

In 2000, Limón de la Cerca was considered a failure in community reconstruction by a number of experts, including AID's National Chief of Housing and many residents. But why was this so? The problems associated with disaster mitigation and community reconstruction in this locality were not caused by logistical constraints. In the case of this community's reconstruction, material resources were sufficient to produce a standard of living much higher than that which was observed throughout the ethnographic research. Instead, The challenges confronted by the *damnificados* arose from the deployment of discursive practices and systems of signification that materialized a very particular reality that hindered the mitigation of Hurricane Mitch's destructive effects.

According to the community's health center census (Matus et al 2000), 4,164 people living in 904 families resided in Limón de la Cerca in the year 2000. Of these households, 38% were female headed (25% for the national census). Among those residents older than 7 years of age, only 19% were permanently employed, 39% were temporarily employed, and 42% were unemployed. Thirty four percent of the adult residents were illiterate, only 25% of them finished elementary school and only 1.48% finished secondary school (Matus et al. 2000). In terms of nutritional epidemiology, 41.7% of all children under five years of age were underweight, 37.5 % had heights that were too short for their age, and 12.5% had weights that were too low for their heights according to the Centers for Disease Control's international standards (Barrios et al. 2000).

These statistics, however, provide only a particular representation of *damnificados*; an image that glosses over the complexities and nuances of everyday life in Limón de la Cerca. These translations omit important information concerning the capacities, resources, realities, and contestations of Limón residents. These figures comprise a representation of the *damnificado* as a collection of deficiencies, a passive, female, malnourished, illiterate and unemployed victim who has little to contribute to the process of disaster reconstruction beyond its position as a trope of neediness in the aesthetics of international assistance (Douglas 1992, Gronemeyer 1993): The grateful and cooperative recipient.

James Ferguson (1999) has tackled similar issues concerning the relationship between the performativity of knowledge systems – the episteme's role in determining what an object of inquiry is, what properties and values the *damnificados* are to be known by-,

what knowledge can be made about this object, and what practices are deemed possible on the basis of this knowledge. For Ferguson, quantifications such as those presented above create an image of research subjects as matchstick people, defined by means, medians and standard deviations that are shallow in ethnographic depth. These representations limit the possibilities of what we may know about *damnificados* and what relationships we may establish with them as disaster survivors in the reconstruction process. These quantifications are also part of a broader discourse about a failed linear ascendance to a singular modernity that inevitably revives modernist notions of development, the unquestionable benevolence of international aid, and colonial hierarchizations of knowledge.

The presentation of disaster survivors in terms of economic indicators, literacy levels and other demographic characteristics emerges from a positivist imagining of research locations as places that can be known in their entirety. This notion that there is an entirety that is best captured in the form of means, medians, proportions and standard deviations is linked to a tendency in modernist ethnographies to edit conflicting narratives and evidence from anthropological studies in an effort to create a linear, bounded, and monistic presentation of social knowledge (Taussig 1987). More importantly, these indicators are a form of mimesis in which what passes for the ethnographic whole is a translation fashioned in terms of histories of scientific representation (Foucault 1970), particular notions of what the other is, and assumptions about the inherent desirability of certain properties (literacy, capital accumulation, nuclear coupling). The *damnificado*, as presented above, is more a discursive product particularly intelligible to some lectors but contested by the very words of Limón

residents as they speak about their lives and their actions. This chapter is about those words and actions.

Postcolonial anthropologists find contradictory forms of evidence to be an important source of information rather than a nuisance to be edited out of ethnographies as outliers or hearsay. Giving up the myth of a singular knowable whole allows the researcher to ask questions about the politics of knowledge, the material and meaningful properties of multiple realities, and to understand the social life of things like donated houses and reconstruction actor categories.

I put these arguments forward keeping in mind that it is unfair to state that statistical information tells us absolutely nothing about disaster survivors, that it is a useless construction completely detached from the realities of Limón residents. What I would like to do is raise the question: What uses does this type of knowledge lend itself to in disaster reconstruction? What kinds of objects of inquiry do such quantifications allow us to consider in disaster reconstruction? What possibilities for practice do such quantifications enable? And, what other ways of approaching *damnificados* as an object of anthropological inquiry can we explore that are perhaps more informative concerning the materialization of dire conditions in this community? These questions are not intended to deny the presence of things like emaciated bodies in Limón de la Cerca. Instead, they are intended to arouse a critical inquiry concerning what they are an effect of. As chapter 7 will illustrate, epistemic performativity in positivist methodologies like nutritional epidemiology can severely inhibit our capacity to consider the role of power, discourse, knowledge hierarchizations, and alterity in the materialization of such bodies.

Finally, the *damnificados* are not the only actors in this daily life. The roster also includes the NGO architects, consultants, nutritionists, health promoters, project planners and evaluators that actively participated in shaping the reality of this site. The geographic location of this community, then, extends beyond Choluteca, and into the offices of bilateral and international institutions in distant cities like Tegucigalpa.

Given that Limón de la Cerca emerged as a community through the interaction of not only disaster victims, but also experts, political leaders and aid agency workers, this inquiry must expand to address issues of heterogeneity within each actor category. Moreover, the variation that I am interested in exploring is not limited to tangible or readily quantifiable traits like education and household income. This analysis must also include a discussion of subjectivities and discursive realities. Finally, I am interested in how institutional systems of power-knowledge delimit what is real, what is feasible, and how a community is to be reconstructed.

Reconstructing Marginality: The Founding of Limón de la Cerca

The narrative that follows is a partial one. It was collected primarily, from older male residents of Limón de la Cerca and Marcelino Champagnat. *Pulperos* (neighborhood grocers), neighborhood leaders and respected elders contributed different parts. Their recollections were supplemented with focused ethnographic interviews conducted with the town mayor, municipality and NGO workers, and religious officials. Some, especially those that see their interests in the reconstruction of Choluteca threatened by the story, may contest its factual nature. The importance of this composite narrative does not lie on whether it is real or fictional, objective, or politicized. What is important about this story are the disputes, the anxieties, and the sentiments of resistance that arise from the

multiple and sometimes contradictory voices that ethnographic questions stir into action. The story of how Limón de la Cerca came to be is an invaluable window into the complex dynamic of discourses, agency, and experience that characterized post-disaster reconstruction in Choluteca.

From its very birth as a community, Limón de la Cerca witnessed a struggle between the Cholutecan Municipality, the *damnificados*, and neighborhood political leaders. Directly following the storm, families left homeless by the floods sought refuge in schools, churches and warehouses. In the days and weeks following the hurricane, those that could pool the necessary financial resources rented rooms or houses around the town, often in the same neighborhood they lived in before.

Tables 4-1 and 4-2 provide a numerical summary of the of *damnificado* shelter-seeking strategies for Limón de la Cerca and Marcelino Champagnat residents. The tables show the broad patterns of the sequences followed by *damnificados* as they moved from one type of shelter to another, but do not tell us precisely how long they stayed at each particular location. The tables tell us that schools were the primary shelters sought immediately during the emergency phase of the disaster, followed by other houses or

Table 4-1 Shelter-seeking strategies of Limon de la Cerca residents.

Type of Shelter	1 st Shelter		2 nd Shelter		3 rd Shelter	
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
<i>In Choluteca</i>						
School	38	34.2	18	16.2	1	-
Neighborhood	21	18.9	25	22.5	11	9.9
Church	19	17.1	2	-	-	-
Business	5	4.5	1	.9	-	-
<i>Champa</i>	5	4.5	6	5.4	1	-
Relative	3	2.7	3	2.7	1	-

Table 4-1. Continued.

<i>Albergue</i>	2	1.8	1	.9	-	-
Warehouse	2	1.8	-	-	-	-
Friend	2	1.8	1	.9	-	-
Market	2	1.8	-	-	-	-
Street	1	.9	-	-	-	-
Stadium	1	.9	-	-	-	-
Hospital	1	.9	-	-	-	-
<i>Posada</i>	1	.9	-	-	-	-
Bus Station	1	.9	-	-	-	-
<i>Micro</i>	-	-	1	.9	-	-
Other city	-	-	2	1.8	-	-

In Limón de la Cerca

<i>Champa</i> (shanty)	3	.9	29	26.1	22	19.8
Micro	-	-	8	7.2	32	28.8
House	-	-	10	9	17	15.3
Permanently settled	0	0	2	1.8	10	9
<i>Total</i>	111	100	109	98	101	91

squatting locations in unaffected neighborhoods. Relatives and friends also provided housing assistance, but to a lesser degree. Table 4-2 also shows a pattern in which at least 40% of survey respondents in Marcelino were, at one point, residents of Limón de la Cerca. It is important to keep in mind that these tables do not represent a specific time sequence, and that *damnificados* moved from one type of shelter to another at different

Table 4-2 Shelter-seeking strategies for Marcelino Champagnat residents.

Type of Shelter	1 st Shelter		2 nd Shelter		3 rd Shelter	
	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
<i>In Choluteca</i>						
School	13	27.1	4	8.3	-	-
Neighborhood	11	22.9	11	22.9	7	14.6
Church	7	14.7	1	2.1	-	-
Champa	3	6.3	1	2.1	-	-
Relative	2	4.2	5	10.4	-	-
Business	1	2.1	-	-	1	2.1

Table 4-2. Continued.

Friend	1	2.1	1	2.1	-	-
Posada	1	2.1	-	-	-	-
Hospital	1	-	-	-	-	-
Government building	1	2.1	-	-	-	-
Albergue	-	-	-	-	-	-
Street	-	-	-	-	-	-
Stadium	-	-	-	-	-	-
Warehouse	-	-	-	-	-	-
Market	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bus Station	-	-	-	-	-	-
Micro elsewhere	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other city	-	-	1	2.1	2	4.2

In Limón de la Cerca

Champa Limon	1	2.1	7	14.6	6	12.5
Cono Limon	-	-	1	2.1	-	-
Champa Marcelino	1	2.1	7	14.6	8	16.7
Cono Marcelino	-	-	2	4.2	7	14.6
MicroLimon	-	-	-	-	2	4.2
House Marcelino	1	2.1	2	-	8	16.7
Permanently Settled	0	0	5	10.4	7	14.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>92</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>100</i>

rates. While some spent only a few nights at a school shelter and then moved on to rent rooms in unaffected neighborhoods, others remained in large collective shelters for several months.

Table 4-3 lists the neighborhoods and towns that the residents of each community lived in at the time of the Hurricane. At a glance it is evident that the majority of residents in both communities came from the same or similar *barrios* (urban neighborhoods) and *colonias* (suburban neighborhoods) of Choluteca. In the case of both communities, there were respondents that were not directly affected by the storm, and who rented reconstruction site houses whose owners remained in Choluteca. These were a minority of survey respondents. The tables also show that families from outlying rural areas took residence in both communities, although these composed a larger but not a

predominant proportion (14.35 in comparison to 6.3%) in Marcelino. Despite this difference, both communities featured similar compositions, and neither fit neatly within urban-rural, central-marginal dichotomies.

Table 4-3 *Barrios, colonias* and towns of residence of *damnificados* prior to Hurricane Mitch.

	<i>Limon de la Cerca</i>		<i>Marcelino Champagnat</i>	
	Number of		Number of	
	<u>Households</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Households</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Barrios of Choluteca				
Las Arenas	6	5.4	2	4.1
Libertad	1	.9	-	-
Boliqueme	1	.9	-	-
Corbeta	5	4.5	-	-
La Cruz	10	.9	4	8.2
Cuesta de la Julia	4	3.6	-	-
La Fortuna	-	-	1	2.0
Gualiqueme	2	1.8	-	-
El Hospital	-	-	1	2.0
Los Mangos	-	-	1	2.0
Morazan	-	-	1	2.0
Los Viveros	1	.9	-	-
Pamplona	1	.9	-	-
La Providencia	-	-	5	10.2
San Francisco	2	1.8	1	2.0
San Juan Bosco	-	-	1	2.0
Suyapa	6	5.4	2	4.1
Valle	-	-	1	2.0
Venecia	-	-	1	2.0
Brisas del Rio	14	12.6	3	6.1
Brisas del Sur	4	3.6	2	4.1
Buenos Aires	4	3.6	4	8.2
Other barrios	2	1.8	-	-
Subtotal	64	57.6	30	61.5
Colonias of Choluteca				
Las Colinas	-	-	1	2.0
Iztoca	1	.9	-	-
Julio Midense	2	1.8	-	-
Nueva Esperanza	1	.9	2	4.1
Pedro Diaz	13	11.7	-	-
Sagrado Corazon	1	.9	2	4.1

Table 4-3. Continued.

Victor Manuel	1	.9	-	-
Veinte de Mayo			1	2.0
Subtotal	19	17.1	6	12.3
Surrounding rural areas				
El Estruendo	-	-	2	4.1
Santa Lucia	1	.9	-	-
Tapaire	1	.9	-	-
Limon de la Cerca			1	2.0
Marcovia	1	.9	-	-
Monjarraz			1	2.0
Sampile	3	2.7	1	2.0
Yosure	1	.9	-	-
El Triunfo			1	2.0
Yusguare			1	2.0
Subtotal	7	6.3	7	14.35
Other Locations				
Aguas Frias, Copan	-	-	1	2.0
Tegucigalpa	1	.9	1	2.0
Subtotal	1	.9	2	4.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>100</i>

Throughout this ethnography, many reconstruction actors agreed that the magnitude of the catastrophe overwhelmed the emergency management capacities of the local government and assistance institutions. In Choluteca, approximately three thousand homes were destroyed (Choluteca Municipality 2000), the commercial shrimp industry was decimated, and cattle ranching and commercial agriculture suffered smaller but still substantial losses (Choluteca Municipality 2000). As a Samaritan's Purse worker explained, many assistance project managers and political leaders stumbled around the logistics of channeling assistance to those considered most in need: "We had to learn things as we went along, how to identify those that had really lost their homes from those that were trying to get a free house. We could have done better, but it was the first time we had to do this, maybe next time we will know better" (Fieldnotes 2000).

It was of little surprise, then, that three months later, in the final days of January 1999, the founders of Limón de la Cerca were still living in temporary shelters set up in the town's schools. Unhappy with the uncertainty of their situation, neighborhood leaders and religious officials soon began to scout for a permanent resettlement location. They found one along the Pan-American Highway, six kilometers east of the town. The land belonged to a major national bank and remained unused after failed attempts at rice production and cattle ranching. The place was commonly known as Limón de la Cerca, a name it obtained from a small community of approximately 50 households located about 1.5 km away from the highway. With pressure building upon the *damnificados* to vacate school facilities for the coming year, a number of families settled along the sides of the highway.

At the center of the community leadership was Manuel Fernandez. A Spanish brother of the *Marista* Order who, after two decades of living in Choluteca, identified himself as a *damnificado* although some would categorize him as an outsider with strong ties to European religious NGOs. An intense man, with a chain-smoking habit and paternalistic tendencies, his zeal for social justice and grass-roots community development would eventually become central in the story of these two communities.

Frustrated with the municipality's cumbersome bureaucracy, the nascent leadership of Limón de la Cerca attempted to initiate land purchase negotiations with the bank. Up to this point, families were restricted to camping on the sides of the highway, a dangerous arrangement due to the high-speed commercial traffic of the road.

One month after the land invasion, a speeding car killed a young resident. The accident acted as a catalyst on the frustration of the *damnificados*. Community leaders

organized a protest and blocked the two lanes of the most prominent landmark in the region, the Choluteca River Bridge. Police forces arrived, attempts were made to dismiss the protestors, the attempts escalated into pushes, shoves, and swinging batons, and finally, a handful of *damnificados* were arrested. The protest brought unwanted attention to the reconstruction of Choluteca, and the municipality's response was to increase its involvement in the land purchase.

One of the key concerns of the *damnificado* leadership was the purchasing of land at values low enough to afford the allocation of 400 m² parcels. This size was considered an essential foundation for household and community life, providing sufficient separation between latrines and living quarters, and allowing the planting of house gardens and future expansions.

For the municipality's land commission, in contrast, land parcel dimensions and distribution were conceived as being contingent on a cost-benefit narrative that stipulated the random distribution of smaller 200m² land parcels to a greater number of *damnificados*. This practice was rooted on the imagining of the disaster survivor as an alienated, minimally-investing and maximizing universal subject, who, when given a minimal investment, would produce a community in any given location.

The effects of the random distribution of land parcels in Limón de la Cerca cannot be underestimated. The raffle disintegrated prehurricane neighborhood constituencies that provided neighbors with childcare, crime prevention, and economic resources. As Limón de la Cerca resident Doña Cecilia Ordoñez explained to me one day, these practices had dire consequences for the reconstruction site:

Roberto Barrios (RB): And how do you feel [in the community], do you feel tranquil?

Cecilia Ordoñez (CO): No, we don't feel calm because we live with fear, we live with fear in the night, and sometimes one starts to think 'at what time will they come to bother you in the night?' and one sometimes doesn't sleep, because in these *micros* [temporary shelters], they're not too safe, because these things, with one strike you can break them. It breaks, and one thinks of the children, that they are going to be hurt by the delinquents. Because now they don't respect, not even the children are respected now.

RB: But things were the same in Buenos Aires?

CO: no, you know, over there it was healthier, yes, it was healthier there

RB: Why do you think things were healthier there?

CO: because no, look, here we are all mixed, and sometimes we don't know the people, from what *barrio* they were, it's that of one to know somebody, of the same *barrio*, that we already knew each other from before...and now we're all mixed with people we don't know. Then, that's why one, one sometimes has fear. Because, like sometimes you don't have neighbors, you don't have neighbors, and one with the neighbor gets along well, and then that's why one is afraid, and me over there in my *barrio* I had my neighbors, me I wasn't afraid.

I was not afraid, we were all nearby, and not now, because neighbors around here, I don't have, I only have that lady that lives here, she just arrived

RB: and are there other people from Barrio Buenos Aires here in Limón de la Cerca?

CO: Of course, but they are in other *colonias*

RB: they didn't try to keep you together?

CO: We wanted to stay together in the same *colonia*, but no, they didn't let us

RB: you said you wanted to [stay together]?

CO: yes, and they said it wasn't possible, that each person got their own lot

RB: who said that it wasn't possible?

CO: the land commission

RB: That makes no sense, I think it would be the most logical thing, to try to keep the people that know each other together

CO: yes, yes

RB: they didn't listen to you?

CO: yes, they didn't

RB: but that is the most basic thing, to keep communities together...

RESP: yes, because one has more trust with the neighbors, yes, yes, imagine, me over there [in *barrio* Buenos Aires], I would go to the market, and I left my children, they were younger, they were younger, and now that they are bigger, now they are more afraid, I am afraid because someone can do something to them.

A Samaritan's Purse project manager also explained the rise in delinquency and the absence of community integration as an effect of the reconstruction process, although she used an alternative choice of words: "Here, they mixed chickens, dogs and pigs" (Fieldnotes 2000).

In the preceding transcription excerpt, Cecilia Ordoñez shows how the random distribution of land parcels by the municipality's land commission disintegrated prehurricane neighborhood constituencies. This course of action became possible through the enactment of a collection of relationships between disaster survivors, their local government, and donor agencies that were deemed rightful and natural assumptions within the aesthetics of international emergency assistance (Douglas 1992, Gronemeyer 1993). These relationships shared the imagining of disaster survivors as alienated and gracious recipients of minimal investments – the 200m² land parcels. Finally, Cecilia Ordoñez also gives us a brief introduction to the very real repercussions of this conceptualization of disaster survivors.

The community leaders who sided with Manuel Fernandez and organized the Choluteca River Bridge protest were excluded from the land parcel raffle and left without land. The schism between the municipality and the Limón de la Cerca leadership resulted in the fission of Limón into two communities. Led by Manuel Fernandez and a small group of neighborhood leaders, several hundred families moved to another property across the Pan-American Highway, founding Colonia Marcelino Champagnat. The event would prove momentous, and, from that moment on, the two communities folled markedly different paths towards reconstruction.

Today there are two signs in Limón de la Cerca and Marcelino Champagnat that stand as reminders of this process of discursive impositions, resistance, and politicized reconstruction. One is a simple metal sign with the words “Marcelino Champagnat”, marking the location of the renegade community. The community, however, is not known by this name in Choluteca. People prefer to call it by a more familiar name, Manuel

Fernandez. In Limón de la Cerca, a more elaborate sign greets visitors to Colonia Loma Linda. At the bottom of the sign, the Cholutecan Mayor's name has been haphazardly crossed-out by an anonymous resident with black paint (figure 4-8).



Figure 4-8. Limón de la Cerca sign with mayor's name crossed out with black paint.

What follows is an analysis of aid institution, local government, and *damnificado* interactions. These interactions took place among various actors ranging from national project managers and experts to on-site workers and residents. The point that needs to be emphasized in these interactions is that no group of actors can be essentialized or vilified. Simultaneously, there were discernible processes taking place in the reconstruction of Limón that created specific arrangements of reconstruction resources and community residents that presented significant resistances to disaster survivor's attempts to restructure their lives after a catastrophic event. The interactions under scrutiny occurred

in the context of three processes. These were the design and construction of houses, the installation of public electricity, and the distribution of Christmas gifts to community children by a major international religious NGO.

The analysis of these three processes will show the dynamic and interactive network of resistance and accommodation that characterized the reconstruction encounter in Choluteca. This presentation will illustrate how reconstruction actors (program planners and managers, architects, public relations graphic designers) mobilized narratives of body politics and mimetic representations of disaster survivors in ways that significantly influenced the shaping of Limón de la Cerca's materiality. Additionally, the interpretation of these processes will demonstrate that the reconstruction encounters in Limón and Marcelino were not a simple case of discursive impositions. The case of Marcelino will show resistances on the part of disaster survivors to project designs that did not suit their ontological notions of community and home, as well as their accommodations to and transformation of reconstruction resources into suitable relational, semiotic, and material arrangements. Simultaneously, the case of Limón de la Cerca will illustrate the deleterious effects of reconstruction programs where this process of resistance and accommodation, which was vital for the making of commensurable project outcomes, was prematurely interrupted through allusions to allegedly transcendental orders of nature and culture.

The primary lesson of this ethnography is that resistance on the part of project beneficiaries, and accommodation on the part of project managers and community residents to their respective performative realities is an essential element of successful reconstruction program outcomes. These performative realities are no less material than

they are located, contestable, and modifiable. Additionally, the hierarchization of knowledges through the professionalization and managerialization of aid distribution remains a significant limiting factor for the realization of this mangle of practice that was essential for the reconstruction of Southern Honduras. Finally, knowledge hierarchization maintains a system of alterity through expertise, of othering disaster survivors as needy, docile, unskilled, and underdeveloped which is a primary figuration of beneficiaries in the aesthetics of many major international aid agencies. Such a figuration denies the legitimacy of the resistances and realities of *damnificados*, and inhibits critical mediation processes. Project managers and applied anthropologists interested in issues of equity and the democratization of knowledge and technology transfer should make a concerted effort to create spaces where resistance and accommodation are welcomed in multiple localities of the reconstruction encounter (from central national offices to community organizational meetings) rather than shun these as inappropriate departures from beneficiary roles.

Matchbox Houses and Flying Rooftops: Power and Hierarchies of Knowledge in Reconstruction Assistance

A total of 1200 homes were constructed in Limón de la Cerca between 1999 and 2000 by a number of international assistance agencies. These included Atlas Logistique, Samaritan's Purse (Choluteca Municipality 2000), and several independent North American church groups. With the exception of the 235 homes built by Atlas Logistique, all of these homes were built following a similar plan. The houses featured a single 25m² room, with a tin roof, unplastered cinder block walls, bare cement floors, two wooden doors at opposite sides of the structure, and two windows with wooden shutters. The

homes were not equipped with clothes washing basins (*pilas*) or washable latrines with septic tanks (*letrina lavable*).

According to the 2000 community census, 301 houses remained vacant in Limón de la Cerca (Matus et al. 2000) at the time of this ethnography. The homes remained vacant for a number of reasons. Some were donated to individuals that owned several properties in Choluteca, and were not necessarily left homeless by the hurricane's floods. Others belonged to female heads of household who chose to return to Choluteca because of transportation constraints. Others belonged to families that preferred to remain in Choluteca until electricity was installed in the community, as nighttime street gang activity had earned Limón de la Cerca a reputation as a place of robberies, rapes, and murders. Uninhabited houses were systematically dismantled by other residents and nonresidents who used or sold the tin roofs and wooden doors.

In 2000 and 2001, people were not the only agents depriving the homes of their roofs. The strong winds of the plain where Limón de la Cerca was located periodically formed small funnels along principal streets where the newly constructed houses provided a channel for the winds to gain strength. Although small, the funnels were potentially deadly. In the Spring of 2001, one of these funnels lifted the entire roof from a house in Marcelino Champagnat. An elderly resident who had tied his hammock to the support beams was lifted several meters into the air. His back was broken upon landing. He died 23 days later in Tegucigalpa's Hospital Escuela.

The funnels eventually became routine, and the excitement of running for cover before being engulfed in a cloud of dust punctuated the monotony of everyday life. Stories of children dying of injuries caused by falling bricks circulated around the

resettlement zone, creating a new genre of local lore. Few injuries were institutionally documented, but the remaining evidence was difficult to ignore. In one *microalbergue* a resident showed me a circular hole with an 18" diameter that was left on one of her walls by a flying sheet of tin from another house's roof. In Colonia Loma Linda in particular, wind-damaged houses were a common sight. Eventually residents resorted to a number of strategies for securing their roofs, ranging from placing heavy stones on top of their houses to devising new ways of reinforcing the anchoring points (Figure 4-9).

Tin roofs were also unpopular among the children that lived through the hurricane. Parents routinely spoke of their children's panic attacks during the rainy season. The heavy rains made a thunderous noise as they fell on the tin roofs, driving children into corners, under beds, and tables. The tin roofs also excessively heated the homes during the daytime. Ceramic roof tiles, in contrast, were cooler in the day, did not provide a large surface for winds to lift into the air, and did not resonate as much under the heavy rains. Only the homes built by Atlas Logistique used tiles instead of tin.

Structural supports were minimal in the architectural design of the houses. Corner supports were limited to bricks joined in an alternating pattern and linked internally by a piece of rebar (Figure 4-10). Residents experienced in home construction (27% of adult male residents- see table 3-6) insisted that steel-reinforced columns would have cost just as much yet would have provided significantly more structural strength. NGO architects left columns out of the design because they required more labor, which was, for the most part, provided by the residents themselves. In early 2001 two earthquakes shook nearby El Salvador, and the tremors were felt throughout Choluteca. Residents became concerned that the houses would not stand the test of time. In Colonia Panamericana,



Figure 4-9. Limón de la Cerca house with stones securing roof.



Figure 4-10. House construction detail.

residents attributed cracks in their walls to the recent quakes, and insisted that better structural supports would have prevented the damage.

Speaking with Limón resident Doña Maria Amado about her life in the reconstruction site in December of 2000, I was troubled by the narratives of institutional reports that hailed the community as an example of adequate reconstruction:

Roberto Barrios: I wanted to ask you about your house, you already told me that it is very hot inside...

Maria Amado: Yes, sometimes I have to sit outside... look at the houses of Manuel Fernandez [Marcelino Champagnat], how pretty, because there they do have [internal] divisions, they have divisions. They feel fresh when there is more space, and since here we have a lot of family, you know, with all the reduced space... I see that my house is cracking, you know. I start to think that it's going to fall down. One thinks, how many winds will the roof be able to stand? Two houses went up...

Neighbor: Where was it that a roof fell and killed two children?

MA: over there, by *colonia* Samaritana over there. Over there they killed two children because the roof got lifted [by the wind], there was some rain and the wall collapsed. It fell on top of the two children.

In the neighboring community of Marcelino Champagnat, a total of 408 houses were constructed by the Spanish Government, CARITAS Spain, and CARE (CARITAS Española 2000). All homes had internal partitions allowing for 4 different spaces (2 bedrooms, dining/visiting area, kitchen), and clothes washing basins. The front of all houses was plastered and painted as part of the original construction.

In the Cholutecan Municipality's year 2000 *Informe de Gobierno Municipal: Periodo 1998/1999 (Report of the Municipal Government" Period 1998/1999)* the single room houses of Limón de la Cerca appear as a evidence that the reconstruction of Choluteca has been successfully completed (figure 2-3). In the AID budget provided to me as a description of the agency's collaboration in the reconstruction, these same homes appear as a tabulated total. AID provided funds to Samaritan's purse for the construction

of 55 of these structures, and the numbers are to be read as a verification that housing reconstruction in Southern Honduras is proceeding as intended. Funds were allocated, budgetary expenditure deadlines were met, and expenses were accounted for.

In contrast, In the fieldnote excerpt presented below, a Limón resident gives us a differing evaluation of housing reconstruction in Choluteca:

Fieldnotes 4-1. Don Rodrigo Palencia

January 11, 2001

Today I conducted an unstructured ethnographic interview with Don Rodrigo Palencia, one of the members of the directiva [council] of colonia Panamericana. I was walking to Limón from colonia Marcelino when I decided to drink a fresco and relax a little before doing an ethnographic interview. About two blocks from the first entrance on the Panamerican highway there is a pulperia. The pulperia is located in one of the few houses that has plaster, paint, and a post-construction expansion. The exterior of the house also features modifications like a barbed wire fence, a few shade trees and a small bench. The windows also have bars, an addition that few can afford. As I approached and asked for a coke, the attendant, Don Rodrigo, asked me to come inside the house and have a seat, so that I could drink my soda in the shade.

As I came into the house I noticed major differences between this household and those of most of my respondents. The interior was also plastered and painted. A set of wooden shelves was located against the east wall, where most of the groceries for sale at the pulperia were arranged. Against the south wall was a table where an assortment of sweet breads, also for sale, was arranged in plastic bags. On the southwest corner of the house there was a doorway that led to the rear room, an extension constructed by Don Rodrigo at his own expense. The room behind was about 3.5m x 5m in size. The interior of the house was cool and it was actually a pleasant environment, unlike the dark, hot homes of other NC residents. I sat on a plastic chair, and he pulled a seat across from me.

I started our conversation by congratulating him in his house and asked how he had managed. He said something to the effect of "ahorrando y trabajando" (working and saving). So my next question was "what do you do for a living, did it all come out of the pulperia or do you have another job?" He said the pulperia was only part of it. He didn't really have a steady job, as those don't really come by for the people of Limón. He works odd jobs, as they arise, and he specializes in construction. He said a fair share of the money he used to fix his home came from jobs he did in Limón, hooking up water pipes for individual homes from the llaves públicas (public faucets). He charged about 250-300 lempiras per home, and made about 4,000 lps total (270 USD).

As he started telling me about his expertise in construction, I couldn't help but ask for his professional opinion on the homes built in Limón. He had a few things to say. He started by raising concerns about the integrity of the home's frame (something Doña Rosa Maria, another resident of Panamericana had previously pointed out). "A well constructed house has four columns, and the horizontal beam supports go on top of them. But not these houses, they only have a piece of rebar that goes through the cinder blocks on the corners. And I told the construction foreman of the Bolsa [Samaritan's Purse], but he did not want to listen to me, better yet, they don't like it if you make suggestions."

According to Don Rodrigo, it would have been just as expensive to make the columns in terms of materials. The only increase in expense would have been in labor, which was provided free by the home recipients anyway. He said the Bolsa workers were not interested in his suggestions as their interest was in building the homes as quickly as possible to be done with the obligation and profit from leftover materials. He also mentioned that he had worked for Bolsa for a year, so this sparked another question, whether he had seen the almost mythical house plan that was reportedly sent to the Bolsa from the US.

He said such a plan did exist and offered to draw me a reproduction. Which he did. According to his plan, the homes were designed with four partitions. One for a dining room, one for a living room, one bedroom and a bathroom with a "servicio lavable". "So what happened to the map?" I asked. "The Bolsa workers tore it up. These houses were built this way by the mischief [picardia] of the Bolsa staff." The primary culprit, a man by the name of Lic. David Argenial. Don Rodrigo offered to take me to Choluteca one day, where Lic. Argenial built a new home, with materials reportedly leaked from the Bolsa construction project. From Don Rodrigo's perspective, the Bolsa project in Limón is a front used by a few NGO workers to gain construction materials and salaries. The original homes, he says were also meant to be bigger. "They could have built less but better houses. I am a poor man, but I would have built a better house. This is not a house, it is a microhouse [microcasa].

He also pointed out structural weaknesses in the roofs. "They should have put a piece of rebar connecting the [support] beams. How much does a piece of rebar cost? That way, the roof wouldn't go like this [makes flexing gesture with his hands]." According to Don Rodrigo, a cheap metal rod connecting the roof beams would have prevented the flex that takes place under heavy winds and usually results in roofs being blown off houses. Once again, the Bolsa foremen did not want to listen to suggestions from the damnificados.

Speaking of materials, Don Rodrigo reminisced about the home he lost in Barrio las Arenas, Choluteca. It was built of bricks, a material which he prefers to the cinder blocks used in Limón. Tile roofs are also preferred as they provide better insulation from the sun's heat. During our talk he invited me to look at the outside of his house, so that I could see what the consequences of not installing castillos [columns and cross beams] are. The plaster on both sides of the house has cracked. As he showed me on one of the

windows above one of the cracks, the damage extends beneath the plaster unto the house structure itself. "What will happen when a small quake occurs?" The cement of the inside floor is also cracking, as in the case of Dona Rosa Maria's home.

The three items of ethnographic evidence I have presented (the Choloteca Municipality report, the AID budget, and a *damnificado* narrative) highlight the different possibilities for relationships between representation, knowledge, and practice that were at the epicenter of the materialization of Limón as a community facing dire circumstances. In the case of the AID budget, housing reconstruction programs come to be known through the tabulation of financial information. The adequate allocation of financial figures, and their movement through this grid was the sign by which AID's involvement in proper community reconstruction was evaluated in the reconstruction of Southern Honduras.

In the Cholutecan Municipality's annual report, photographic images of neatly aligned houses are offered as representations of that which is real, tangible and undeniable. The photographs allegedly show what *is*. A number of structures, which we are prompted to recognize as houses, were built and there are people living in these structures, leading to the conclusion that the reconstruction has been carried out successfully.

Don Rodrigo's narrative, in turn, loosens the rigidity with which the two previous documents defined and evaluated disaster assistance, and beckons us to consider other ways of defining adequate reconstruction practices and outcomes. In this narrative, the houses represented in the Cholutecan municipality report do not qualify as adequate houses for *damnificados*. *Esto no es casa, es microcasa. This is not a house, it is a microhouse.* These structures also require another way of knowing as an alternative to

fiscal representation if we are to evaluate the adequacy of reconstruction programs.

Budget expenditures severely limit those things we may know about the way in which the distributed structures function in the context of a community like Limón, where they are not mere objects unto themselves, but exist in relational terms with people and communities. Don Rodrigo's words compel us to think about the different ways in which objects like community, disaster victim, and aid are delineated and rendered.

These three forms of evidence also present us a node of the irreducible matrix of postdisaster reconstruction. This is a dynamic space where alliances are formed between actors, resources, and discourses. This is also a place where some actors contest others' decisions concerning community reconstruction, and where these decisions are accompanied by very specific arrangements of things like cinder blocks, pieces of rebar, and supportive columns. Additionally, this is a matrix where technologies and resources are, when allowed, pliable and capable of being massaged into arrangements that make sense and are functional for disaster survivors. Functional, in this case, is not to be understood as indicative of a functionalist theoretical undercurrent, but as a material-semiotic (performative) property that is contingent on location specific meanings, relations, and delineations of the real and tangible. The act of massaging resources involves more than a physical transformation, but a shift in the relationship between these objects and disaster survivors and project managers. It is therefore an act of ontological alteration.

The interview with Don Rodrigo is not limited to the criticisms of a disgruntled disaster victim. He also gives us a glimpse of the materiality that would have characterized Limón de la Cerca had the process of massaging and transforming housing

reconstruction programs not been aborted at an early stage. *And I told the construction foreman of the Bolsa, but he did not want to listen to me, better yet, they don't like it if you make suggestions.* This materiality would have featured homes with roofs that were better attached and that could therefore sustain the stress of strong winds, columns and support beams that would prevent walls from cracking, and larger living spaces with internal partitions.

Don Rodrigo mentions the existence of an alternative plan for the construction of houses in Limón. This plan included internal partitions, larger floor plans, and amenities like washable latrines that were not featured in the constructed houses. Don Rodrigo insists that these homes were not constructed because of the *picardia* of a Samaritan's Purse program manager. With regards to the change in design, Samaritan's Purse workers insisted it was necessary to reduce the size of constructed homes because of the reduced size of the distributed house lots. These lots, in turn, were reduced with the intention of giving a greater number of *damnificados* a minimal investment. Ironically, this cost-benefit mindset resulted in the construction of an excess of houses that remained vacant in 2000 and 2001.

Despite the reduced size of land parcels, other aid agencies like Atlas Logistique managed to devise housing designs that included internal partitions, tile roofs, and metal doors, which Limón residents found more desirable. The reduced size of house parcels, then, cannot completely account for the decision to build single room, 25m² homes. *They could have built less but better houses. I am a poor man, but I would have built a better house.*

Where Opacity is an Effect of Power, Produced by Antipolitics Machines and the Managerialization of Disaster Reconstruction

The disaster literature suggests that Limón's housing problem extends beyond the limitations of land parcel size, and that it may be related to the imagining of the disaster survivor as a needy, grateful, unquestioning, minimally investing, benefit maximizing, alienated subject (Gronemeyer 1993, Douglas 1992). Additionally, this imagining is linked to the institutionalization of certain forms of technoscientific management (Brosius 1999) in disaster assistance that displaces *damnificado* voices, precludes certain forms of praxis and enables others. These observations foreground the discussion of discourse in its capacity as epistemic technology, representation, and reconstruction practice. The following discussion of a post Hurricane Fifi (the last catastrophic hurricane to hit Honduras prior to Hurricane Mitch) reconstruction housing satisfaction study and fieldnotes taken from an interview with AID's National Chief of Housing will illuminate this point.

In 1994, Neil Snarr and Leonard Brown published the results of a longitudinal study (a 22 question instrument was used in 1976 and 1987) of reconstruction housing resident satisfaction among Hurricane Fifi *damnificados*. Their description of San José de los Laureles, a post-Fifi reconstruction site in Northern Honduras, bears an uncanny resemblance to Limón de la Cerca. It seems that few things have changed in reconstruction housing design during the last quarter century:

the majority [of houses] were built of cement block and have concrete floors and tin (lamina or zinc) roofs. The houses contain approximately 25 m² of floor space and cost \$658 (US) for the material. They were constructed by volunteers and future residents. The latter received food for their work. (Snarr and Brown 1994:77)

In their introduction to this same article, Snarr and Brown comment that Fifi, which struck Honduras in 1974 and left 100,000 people homeless, was the fourth major

storm that hit the country in the 20th century. In their narration, the *damnificado* emerges in as an incapacitated, deficient, passive benefactor whose stubbornness disaster experts must struggle to overcome:

It was the fourth such storm this century, but the residents were not prepared and loss of life and property was extensive. Most of the loss of life and housing was in the small villages along rivers and on steep hillsides facing the Sula Valley. (Snarr and Brown 1994:77)

The objective of Snarr and Brown's article was to conduct a long-term evaluation of the adequacy of postdisaster housing reconstruction that prioritized disaster survivor needs and values.

We decided very early in this research that the housing recipients were the 'experts' on how successful these housing projects were, and we subsequently used them as evaluators. We employed local interviewers and, as in 1976, we asked 22 questions concerning housing satisfaction. (Snarr and Brown 1994:78)

Under the auspices of the rhetoric of participatory development, disaster survivors are said to become the evaluators. But the meaning of participation quickly shifts referents in this case, and it comes to indicate that disaster survivors answered a sequence of structured questions devised by the researchers. These questions did not permit residents to elaborate why they were either pleased or displeased with donated houses, and specified those things that could and could not be spoken about.

Residents in the study were asked whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with access to institutional services (church, school, market, transport), work (distance, employment opportunities), housing design and construction (materials and space), housing facilities (fresh air, toilets, bath, cooking space), and reconstruction site characteristics (garden space, space between houses, personal security). Study results revealed satisfaction decreases with church accessibility (18% decrease), school

accessibility (29%), transport accessibility (37%), house material (11%), floor material (15%), roof material (40%), interior space (29%), and personal security (51%) to name just a few. Of 22 indicators, there were only increases in satisfaction with accessibility of markets and bathing facilities.

Between 1976 and 1987 Snarr and Brown found that there was an overall average of 20% erosion in satisfaction among San José residents. Nonetheless, they conclude that the difference is partially an effect of inflated satisfaction values in their baseline 1976 survey, a honeymoon effect created by the gratitude of disaster survivors who, following this logic, would rather receive something than nothing at all.

While the 'honeymoon effect' that was present in 1976, when the residents were only a year removed from destitution and homelessness, has diminished, their standard of living has, for the most part, improved and their expectations have been raised. Although the 1980s have been exceedingly difficult for Central Americans, the residents of San Jose generally live better, undoubtedly due in part to the housing they received in 1976, after Hurricane Fifi. (Snarr and Brown 1994:80)

Because the study instrument did not allow San José residents to specify the reasons for their diminished satisfaction, the authors are left to device ad hoc explanations for their shift. These explanations include increased expectations as community residents are exposed to new commodities and services and changes in urban landscapes that create new annoyances and hazards. What is most interesting about Snarr and Brown's brief article is the way in which the adequacy of aid is never mentioned or considered. Perceived decrease in satisfaction is repeatedly constructed in their narrative as a problem external to the materiality of aid and the process of aid distribution. It is a problem of the other.

This rendering of aid distribution as a space where problematics and politics lie outside the institutional realm is a theme that can be found in other social science articles like Johan Pottier's (1996) "Why aid agencies need a better of understanding of the communities they assist: The experience of food aid in Rwandan refugee camps." In this case, Pottier uses ethnographic methods to demonstrate how political factions among beneficiary populations can inhibit the adequate and impartial distribution of emergency assistance. While Pottier's point is well taken- Limón de la Cerca was, after all, a site mired in community political contestations- it is important to note that these articles bear important implications for the way researchers circumscribe what can be an object of social science inquiry and what cannot. The omission of institutional actors and knowledge systems from ethnographic analyses can be a critical failure in cases like Limón, where these agents played an important role in the creation of adverse conditions. Simultaneously, the sole emphasis on beneficiaries as the singular location for intervention and of investigation reinvents colonial hierarchies and imperative calls to "save the natives from themselves."

The reason I have included these comments is not to unabashedly discredit the work of fellow social scientists. Instead, I include them as part of an effort to understand how single room, 25 m², tin roof houses came to be seen by Samaritan's Purse and AID program managers as an adequate means for housing reconstruction after Hurricane Mitch. The answer to this question lies in the professionalization of knowledge and the bureaucratization of the reconstruction process as it is featured in the AID budget I presented earlier and Snarr and Brown's analysis of resident satisfaction. These are discursive systems of knowledge that exclude certain voices, practices, and forms of

evidence (*damnificado* narratives, home construction suggestions, requests to keep old neighbors together) while enhancing others (reduction of land parcel size, random distribution of land parcels, single room housing) in reconstruction program design and evaluation.

The budget, journal article, and municipality annual report are performative in the sense that they delimit what the elements of disaster reconstruction projects *are*. These are delimited in their contours (the 22 variables of Snarr and Brown's evaluation, the monetary figures of AID's budget) and their metaphysical properties (a system of fiscal representation, a collection of specific attributes). This is done at the expense of other ways of delimiting what gets to count as real, as a house, as community life, and of establishing relationships between actors and these objects. In Judith Butler's (1993) words, these regulatory ideals shape the possibilities for what may come to *matter* in disaster reconstruction. This is not a conspiracy or a product of questionable intentionality, it is the effect of power-knowledge structures that enhance the agencies of certain actors, plans, and imaginings in disaster reconstruction (the Samaritan's Purse construction foreman for example) and inhibit those of others.

The politics of knowledge in Snarr and Brown's presentation feature an interesting twist. In this case, a reported decrease in resident satisfaction is made secondary to the authors' assurance that, twenty years after the hurricane, "the residents of San Jose generally live better, undoubtedly due in part to the housing they received in 1976" (1994:80). Such a move constitutes the creation of the opacity of *governance* that Mbembe speaks about as the form of excess that precipitates conditions of crisis in postcolonial locations. The visual metaphor operates on the principle that the forms of

bureaucratization and disaster management that comprise the life of a budget, a professional journal article, and a municipality annual report actually create a smoke screen that impairs our capacity to understand the processes that lead to the creation of resource distribution patterns that exacerbate more than they mitigate the effects of a catastrophe: the irreducible matrix of discourses, agencies, and politics of the reconstruction encounter. In Snarr and Brown's conclusion, the 25m² home construction design lives on as a minimal investment that needy disaster survivors should be grateful to receive.

In July of 2001, after completing 230 nutritional surveys, 40 structured ethnographic interviews and over 100 unstructured ethnographic interviews I was still perplexed by the sequence of reasoning that created the conditions where housing reconstruction program architects and foremen visualized the construction of single room homes as a viable course of action. On the third day of this month I conducted an interview with a reconstruction actor I met through email communications with various AID staff members. Mark Pearce was the national chief of housing programs for AID at the time of this ethnography. The following excerpt from an interview conducted with him will illustrate the way in which the professionalization and bureaucratization of reconstruction aid distribution perpetuated the opacity of governance in Choluteca after Hurricane Mitch.

Fieldnotes 4-2 Mark Pearce.

July 3, 2001

Mark Pearce is the designated "Jefe de Vivienda" (Chief of Housing) at the AID office of municipal development and democratic initiatives. We met at 9:00 am at the AID office in Tegucigalpa. The place had an institutional feel. Central air conditioning, wall to wall

carpeting, cubicles, off-white walls, a couple of magic marker boards with drawings of sewage systems and aerial photos of Honduran towns. I was led to a conference room, and waited there for a few minutes. Eventually, I was joined by Mark, a man in his mid thirties, dressed in an oxford shirt and tie. The conversation started in a congenial tone, Mark being primarily interested in placing me in the broader institutional scheme of things. He wanted to know what agency I was affiliated with and if I was working directly with a NGO. After explaining my research I opened the interview with a broad question. I wanted to know what AID's role was in relation to hurricane-affected communities during the organization and implementation of reconstruction programs. I was interested in understanding how reconstruction aid was distributed. Did AID just manage funding, playing only a minor role in the design or supervision of projects, or was its role more direct?

Mark responded:

"After the hurricane, AID sent to Honduras what is termed 'ayuda extraordinaria' (extraordinary aid) for reconstruction. On september 20, 1999, AID sent out an RFA (Request for Assistance), which is basically a call for proposals. In response to this, a number of institutions responded, mainly NGO's with proposals for reconstruction programs."

With regards to housing, I asked what the AID criteria for approval of housing projects were. Was there a requirement for cultural sensitivity, structural soundness, size and space distribution? Mark told me that the housing projects were required to be "permanent solutions," with an emphasis on what they called "integrated solutions" ("soluciones integrales"). The "integrated" part refers to the integration of the home within its spatial conditions. What he meant by this was that homes were meant to be more than just a housing structure. Constructed homes were required to be accompanied by potable water (which is not yet available in Limón), access to public ways, latrines and sewage (also not present, although funds for it have been disbursed) and that the area of reconstruction not be in a zone of high risk.

Speaking of the actual design of houses, Mark said that specific requirements for the actual homes were not made as a way to "open it up to the creativity on the part of NGO's. We were not interested in establishing a specific design nor location (i.e. central town area, peripheral urban area). In the whole country, AID is financing the construction of 6,000 housing units, for a value of 18 million dollars. There are 55 reconstruction zones around the country in 25 of which AID is participating."

As the person in charge of housing reconstruction, it is Glenn's responsibility to make sure that NGO's meet the established parameters. It is his job to make sure that housing programs are meeting the integration guidelines, otherwise fund disbursement may be frozen. Whenever an NGO does not meet the guidelines, they are called upon for a negotiation, and if criteria are still not met, the funds are withheld.

Before speaking specifically about Limón, Glenn wanted to mention a couple of challenges that were met at a macro level that have impeded, or made reconstruction more cumbersome. With regards to housing, the major challenge was that "in Honduras there is no real functional housing market (En Honduras no existe un mercado funcional de vivienda). That was one of the greatest problems in structural terms. Instead of channeling money for the reconstruction through the existing mechanisms, we had to create a market. We created a parallel housing market which will disappear when our funding ends."

AID, which is the largest contributor for housing reconstruction had to create an entire market for the construction of the homes. That included material supplies, logistics, labor, and transport. The housing situation is a challenge for the entire country according to Mark. "It is a challenge to the entire country, how to improve the housing market. The problem is that this parallel market that we created will disappear when the reconstruction is done." AID has also acted as the housing regulating agency, as mentioned above, they have the power to freeze funds on institutions that do not meet integration criteria.

Glenn went on to admit that "Limón de la Cera is a time bomb that must be controlled. ["Limón de la Cera es una bomba de tiempo que hay que controlar"]. The situation in Amarateca (the major resettlement location for Tegucigalpa's damnificados) is also lamentable." Unfortunately, he said that the regulation of the problems affecting these sites falls within the gray area of AID's jurisdiction.

Mark tried to put things in institutional perspective, to show me how, despite the fact that three years have passed, reconstruction is just starting. When the hurricane hit, people went to albergues, being housed in schools, warehouses etc. There was pressure to get families out of schools so children would not lose a year of school. The Honduran government, however, was incapable of giving an answer to such a massive crisis. AID came into the picture. The immediate needs were the financing of macroalbergues. Fourteen were constructed around the country, and only 2 remain, the "treboles," which is considered quite an accomplishment. Then came the next challenge. How to provide a permanent solution to the housing crisis without a housing market.

In September 1999, AID sent the call for proposals. This was 11 months after the disaster, so AID was not involved in housing until nearly one year after Mitch. By mid November 1999, the awards were made to NGOs, and disbursements were not made until January of 2000. Most of the houses built in Limón were constructed by Samaritan's Purse with their own funding. The construction of homes with AID funds did not begin until July of 2000, and homes are still being constructed. To date, 3300 homes have been constructed.

According to Glenn, the delays are due to the challenges of being able to channel 18 million dollars in a country plagued by corruption. The mechanisms of control and transparency take time to institute. The total amount of money spent on reconstruction projects sums up to 290 million dollars around the country. This includes sewage and

water projects, economic reactivation, home reconstruction, and infrastructure reconstruction. There are auditors working along with these projects, doing supervisory work as the projects are carried out.

We finished our conversation by talking about the mayor of Choluteca, a man he knows personally and who he considers to have an excellent reputation as far as AID is concerned.

This interview with AID's national chief of housing shows that an analysis of power-knowledge in postdisaster reconstruction should not be equated with the vilification of singular individuals, whether they are institutional workers or community residents. Mark Pearce is a program director that realizes that there are critical limitations in the way the institutional structures he works within are capable of addressing the pressing conditions faced by the residents of Limón and Amarateca. *Unfortunately, he said that the regulation of the problems affecting these sites falls within the gray area of AID's jurisdiction.* Nevertheless, he maintains that the system of management through which AID approached the reconstruction remains the best available means of structuring disaster assistance in an imperfect world.

Housing markets and the institutionalized rhetoric of integrated solutions took precedence in AID's approach to housing construction, a framework that enhanced the agency of certain ways of imagining disaster survivors (as a minimally investing, maximizing, alienated, grateful and docile recipients) by NGO architects and program managers. *Specific requirements for the actual homes were not made as a way to "open it up to the creativity on the part of NGO's."*

The way in which AID's discourse of reconstruction delimited and foregrounded what the elements of disaster reconstruction *were* (housing markets, transparency

structures, integrated solutions, fiscal accounting) did not automatically create the conditions of crisis I have described in Limón, but enhanced certain agencies and created a context where courses of action (the random distribution of single room homes in a community without electric power) that were not in the best interest of many *damnificados* became possible and reasonable. This discursive context, when combined with a system of othering disaster survivors and multiple forms of politics (of knowledge, of social class, of local governments) created a volatile mixture. *Limón de la Cerca is a time bomb that must be controlled.*

The rhetorical catch phrase of integrated solutions is an important element of the managerialization of disaster reconstruction that I am calling attention to. In light of this ethnography, integrated solutions joins the rank of other buzzwords like terror (Taussig 1987), sustainable and participatory development (Brosius 1999, Crewe and Harrison 1998, Escobar 1995) which play on and confuse the relationships between signs and referents. These words are powerful because their meanings vary from one lector to the next. So, while sustainable forestry may invoke images of seedling trees being planted by members of an indigenous cooperative in the highlands of Guatemala for an environmental activist, for a member of the Malaysian interior ministry they may refer to a system of economic cost benefit through which decisions are made as to how to manage a logging area (Brosius 1999). What these words become a referent for in institutional settings then, are concepts that do not necessarily establish a connection with what is at stake (political contestations, knowledge hierarchizations, technologies that do not work out of the box, people whose subjectivities do not match the way they are conceptualized by reconstruction actors that make decisions about resource distribution) for

damnificados in the reconstruction of communities like Limón. More telling, despite rhetoric of integrated solutions and AID's assumed position as a housing regulatory agency, in two of the country's largest reconstruction sites (Limón de la Cerca, Amarateca), at the time of this interview AID had not taken actions to address the processes that created "lamentable" conditions.

To add some complexity to this argument, I must point out that I do not claim that this discursive context was merely a useless ideological framework with no connection to the materiality of reconstruction. On the contrary, the system of management and professionalization that Mark outlines is tangible in the sense that, within it, people are doing things and moving resources, whether it is allocating figures in a spreadsheet or loading a semi truck in San Pedro Sula with 10,000 pounds of cinder blocks. It is precisely this materiality of discourse that makes the opacity it creates so powerful with respect to the different ways *damnificados* in Limón defined and materialized their ontologies, homes, and community.

In his responses, Mark indicates that *there is no real functional housing market in Honduras*, and that such a deficiency is the principal reconstruction challenge for his institution. What is interesting of such a claim is that it suggests that a particular arrangement of people and resources that follows certain stipulations of supply and demand, notions of value, aesthetics of consumption, imagining, and desire – what he calls, *a functional housing market* – is the proper and most effective way of constructing houses. Although Mark notes that there is no housing market in Honduras, this should not be interpreted as an indication that homes are not constructed in this region, or that home construction remains an impossibility. In Tegucigalapa and Choluteca, home construction

is an ongoing and dynamic aspect of community life. In the hurricane-affected neighborhoods of Choluteca, people like Don Rodrigo Palencia played an active role in the construction of their own houses, making additions and modifications as time passed and circumstances changed. Materials for construction like sand and blocks were often locally produced. The Choluteca River, for example, continues to provide many families who procure sand for construction with a livelihood. This system of home construction differs in both ontological and relational terms from the capitalist market Mark imagines and recognizes as the proper means of large-scale home construction, but such a difference does not amount to impossibility.

The problem, then, does not lie in a disjuncture between discourse outlined by Mark and a singular reality, but in the way this discourse delimits what is worthy of concern, precludes the possibility of alternative arrangements of people, meanings and resources, and has material and tangible effects. Some of these effects are useful to disaster survivors (materials need to be moved, money must be disbursed and managed), but others, like the way some reconstruction actors prioritize certain discursive elements (markets, integrated solutions) of disaster reconstruction at the expense of other relevant concerns (columns, internal house divisions, keeping neighbors together), are not.

In this interview, Mark admits that he and other members of AID staff are aware that their institutional guidelines for the implementation and evaluation of disaster reconstruction does not capture the totality of concerns at stake in the reconstruction of places like Limón. In the fieldnote excerpt below, we see how this awareness was not limited to one AID administrator, but was shared by other fellow NGO workers.

Fieldnotes 4-3. Helen Wallace

May 18, 2001

Today was a very good day for talking with NGO folks in both Marcelino and Limón de la Cerca. The first thing I did was find Manuel Fernandez and give him a copy of my SFAA paper so he and the Caritas volunteers can comment on it. He was his usual stern paternalistic self, but also very open and willing to collaborate.

Then I headed to Limón de la Cerca where I found Mr. Ramón Rosa in the middle of working on the sewage project. He was very proud in that his daughter was helping in the construction site. Good for her. He's quite a character. She was angry that he had spilled the tools all over the place and was expecting her to pick them up. I asked about the electrification of the community once again, and he told me there was an activity going on in the Plantel (community center) where all the community leadership was present as well as the AID and FUNDEMUN crowd. I couldn't pass up such an opportunity as I had extra copies of my paper to share so I ran off and went to see what was going on.

The purpose of the activity was to introduce a new structure of community organization in Limón. The colonia has 8 development committees, the leaders of which form a high council. Now, under each development committee, there will be several committees, for health, sanitation, water purification etc.

The important thing is that I got to meet Helen W. Wallace, a Municipal Development Advisor for AID. I gave her a copy of my paper and we started a conversation about the social issues surrounding the reconstruction of Limón. The issue of program evaluation came up, and of determining whether communities were being adequately reconstructed or not. We talked about the mara and vacant house situation in Limón. We spoke about the need to have people on the ground to verify project expenditures, build rapport and identify households in most need (something that is absent in Limón), and understand damnificado notions of home and community. An interesting theme arose at this point. Helen told me that, despite their best intentions and desire to design reconstruction programs that included such concerns, AID personnel were told that they had to spend all the granted money by December of 2000. . For that reason, they were pressed to meet the expenditure demand, and did not have enough time for project planning and follow up. The full expenditure of the budget became the primary concern over the tailoring of reconstruction projects to their localities. In her words:

"We had to spend all the money by December. Not much planning involved. We did not have the luxury. We were pressed."

Despite all of AID's shortcomings, she was very receptive; we exchanged emails and agreed to share more information.

Despite this awareness, AID staff reiterated a discourse of reconstruction that enabled the agencies of a collection of actors (of strong winds that remove the roofs of homes, of local municipality officials who randomly distributed miniscule house lots, of Samaritan's purse program managers who opted to build single room homes) in Limón. The actions of these actors, in turn, created living conditions in Limón that overwhelmed many community residents. The key question then becomes: why, despite the awareness of the importance of certain "grey areas of AID jurisdiction," were some concerns made to *matter* more than others?

The answer to this question is multifaceted. It involves the acknowledgement that performative (discourse contingent) realities are not merely constructed, but have a materiality and agency that exert a considerable amount of gravitational pull upon subjects like housing program managers. Hence, subjects may consider the possibility that there may be alternative approaches to community reconstruction, but are not quite prepared to part with a familiar discourse-practice system for fear of a complete breakdown of order, of reality itself. It also involves the recognition of the way the managerialization of reconstruction functions as a system of othering and is productive of a constellation of subjects and objects that includes the fashioning of not just *damnificados*, but of project managers themselves. Mark's discourse of reconstruction, like Snarr and Brown (1994) and Pottier's (1996) articles, draws a cordon sanitaire between experts/managers and disaster survivors, denoting the latter as subordinated subjects, separate from the expert self. The *damnificados*' properties, in turn make the manager's expertise and method necessary, much like the Indian as the colonial mirror

that was essential for the colonialist's self-fashioning and righteous ascendance to governance (Taussig 1987).

There is something profound in the self-fashioning, self-awareness, and division between subject and object in modernist discourses. Alterity in disaster reconstruction is not just about inscribing *damnificados* through tropes and categorizations, but about the self-fashioning of institutional actors as experts, managers, and professionals; much like fieldwork and the application of research methodologies are for anthropologists. Through such divisions, the failures of reconstruction are seen as originating from disaster victims, and not from a complex matrix of knowledge, micropower, and agencies. This is not a matter of intentionality or conspiracy, but an effect of management and professionalization we must account for if we are serious about addressing the emergence of crises like that of Limón. In the section that follows, the case of Marcelino Champagnat will demonstrate the work of alterity as an agency-enhancing force.

Mangling Technologies and Alternative Discourses of Alterity: Different Possibilities for Post-Disaster Community Reconstruction

The urgency to problematize the institutional representation of reconstruction housing programs is underscored by the markedly different realities that can emerge from institutional reports, an anthropologist's ethnographic experience, and the narratives of community residents. Figure 4.6 shows an excerpt of the Cholutecan Municipality's *Informe de Gobierno Municipal Periodo 1998/1999*. In this document, Limón de la Cerca is showcased as an institutional triumph over both the natural and societal poles of the modernist great divide. Single-room cement-block houses with tin roofs in the middle of a semi-arid plain are presented as a solution to the vulnerable conditions of adobe

structures adjacent to rivers. More than a mere case of technology transfer, the alignment of the houses along straight rows, the uniformity of their appearance, and their constrained spatial dimensions are indicative of a process social homogenization and management. The images are inspiring save for one minor detail: The model does not work for the people assigned to live in it.

Not all encounters between *damnificados* and assistance agencies resulted in such deplorable outcomes. As Doña Maria Amado suggested, conditions were significantly different in nearby Marcelino Champagnat. Even so, according to community residents, the acquisition of houses with better spatial distribution did not come without a struggle. Originally, the community leadership was approached by CARE. The institution was planning the construction of 80 houses following a single room, 25 m² plan. The leaders were confronted with a major dilemma. This was not the desired plan, and quietly accepting this donation could have a long-term impact on the daily lives of Marcelino families. Finally, a decision was made to reject CARE's plan, a bald and dangerous move, as the *damnificados* feared that taking an assertive role that violated the expectations of submission and gratitude expected of beneficiaries could cost them this minimal shelter. In the end, the tactic proved worthwhile. This is yet another story that has now reached epic proportions in Marcelino Champagnat, and it is proudly re-told by residents and leaders alike: "We told them we did not want their matchbox houses, and that we would rather stay living in the *conos*, and two weeks later, they came back with plans for larger houses and with four rooms!" (Fieldnotes 2001).

The reconstruction of houses in Marcelino Champagnat is another node of the matrix of discourses, politics, resources, and representations of disaster reconstruction.

Unlike the case of Limón, however, the relationships between these elements took a form that was seen as more conducive to the creation of a community by residents from both localities. In the fieldnote excerpt that follows, we see how the transformation of CARE's housing reconstruction project involved a dynamic interaction between community residents, NGO managers, their respective desires, and discourses of cost-benefit.

Fieldnotes 4-4 Hernán Carrizales.

August 12, 2003

Hernán Carrizales was the Coordinator for the Southern Zone for CARE during the reconstruction of houses in Marcelino Champagnat in 1999 and 2000. Two years after my fieldwork in Limón de la Cerca, I met him at the central offices of CARE in Tegucigalpa with the intention of talking about the tailoring of housing reconstruction in Marcelino. This is what he had to say about it:

"In Marcelino Champagnat CARE constructed 80 houses. The houses were distributed to the poorest families. We had a special fund, it was limited with a time of 6 months to spend it. We worked in Marcovia, Tegucigalpa and Choluteca. Marcelino Champagnat was an experimental project. Originally, the funds were designed to create sources of work, it was a project of payment for work. I decided it was better to carry out a housing construction project of, and to pay for the qualified labor.

The 80 homes were constructed in 80 days. There was ample participation. The very damnificados elected the families that would benefit."

With regards to the claims that the damnificados demanded that the dimensions of the houses were, at first, inappropriate, Hernán commented:

"I participated in those meetings. Especially, the meeting where the damnificados asked that the houses be made bigger. You know how those meetings are, sometimes people get agitated. The people said that they did not like the design. They said they were used to sleeping more than one to a room, and that the small size of the houses was not suitable."

"The houses were not originally of a single room, but the rooms were smaller than the ones that were constructed. The plan was brought in from the project at Renacer Marcovia, where there was a plan and design. We did not hire a civil engineer in this case [Marcelino Champagnat], to control the costs."

"The design was for Marcovia. There were two designs, one for Renacer Marcovia and one for Marcelino. It was a matter of cost and benefit. The problem was that in Marcovia, costs were higher. There was an engineer, a manager, an architect, a civil engineer, and a foreman. All of this increased our costs. With CARE we eliminated the

manager, the architect, and we hired five foremen and one senior construction worker per house. The construction assistants were the damnificados, and, that way, the houses came out more affordable."

"There was a lot of participation on the part of the people. The people did not fail. The only ones who failed were the providers of the thermo-acoustic roofing. They took too long to deliver, but that was a problem of Polaris [distributing agency]."

"The terrain was of the type that had elevation changes and subsided, so we thought of three possibilities. To make the houses of adobe, brick or cinder blocks. When we were done calculating our costs we decided that, in terms of construction time and durability, it was best to use cinder blocks."

"In terms of the flooring, we chose a concrete foundation because that soil has a tendency to crack. In the rainy season, the foundations have a tendency to crack. Still, the houses were built during the rainy season, which was not the best time, but that's what the fund specified."

"We had planned to build houses with two rooms and a dining area, and to have a pila outside. The beneficiaros wanted houses with rooms that were 36m² in size. Originally, the rooms were 14 m² in size, but they ended up with 20m² rooms."

Hernán's recounting of the reconstruction encounter in Marcelino Champagant reveals the complexity that I set out to grasp in this ethnography. In this instance CARE staff and Marcelino residents and leaders came together with the intention of reconstructing a community. Each of these actors engaged the other from a perspectival point shaped by their desires, imaginaries and performative realities. CARE staff had every intention of providing *damnificados* with adequate housing, and approached them with a plan that was devised for another reconstruction location in Choluteca, Renacer Marcovia. This technology, however, did not work as intended "out of the box." Marcelino residents thought the dimensions of the houses were too small and rejected the plan.

Faced with a significant resistance on the part of *damnificados* and the ways in which they imagined their community and the types of houses they desired, CARE staff

decided to reevaluate their proposed project. CARE staff's desire to provide *damnificados* with a housing structure that was considered adequate by both institutional and *damnificado* standards (the making of commensurable reconstruction outcomes) was itself confronted by yet another resistance, an internalized narrative of cost-benefit. Hernán and his staff accommodated this resistance by reconfiguring their administrative costs, eliminating non-essential personnel, and building fewer but better houses.

Hernán's story demonstrates relationship between discourse, materiality, and the possibility that such rigid relationships may be massaged and transformed in order to make mutually intelligible forms of disaster reconstruction between program managers and project beneficiaries. While we see this malleability, we also see the reality of narratives of transcendence like cost benefit, which create powerful resistances that challenge the cognitive and material capacities of individuals like Hernán.

The dance of resistance and accommodation that was central to the elaboration of a housing program that met the criteria of adequate reconstruction by multiple actors in Marcelino became possible only under a particular context of establishing relationships among these actors. It could be said, then, that this occurred under a different context of alterity.

In Marcelino Champagnat interactions between local leaders, residents, national and international institutions took a dramatically different form than in Limón de la Cerca. In his ethnographic interviews, for example, Manuel Fernandez continually identified himself as a *damnificado* with the dual purpose of claiming to represent *damnificado* interests, and of overcoming the cordon sanitaire that distanced community residents in Limón from Samaritan's Purse and AID project managers and evaluators. .

In Marcelino Champagnat, CARITAS emphasized the establishment of a volunteer-run reconstruction program that successfully addressed fiscal and transparency issues while insuring that program goals corresponded to the community's self-perceived priorities. In the fall of 2000, when I first arrived in Choluteca, a group of a dozen college-age volunteers was living in Marcelino. The volunteers worked in construction and community organization projects alongside *damnificados*. As part of their duties, they provided third party oversight in all financial transactions, allowing projects to run practically unencumbered by intra-community suspicions and accusations of corruption. They conducted a thorough community census and, most importantly, built close and strong bonds with *damnificado* families.

In contrast, in Limón the separation between NGO staff and *damnificados* was demarcated and reiterated in language and practice. In terms of practice (in addition to the managerialization of reconstruction) the staff of institutions like AID and Samaritan's Purse sustained a geographic distance as an element of alterity. AID evaluation staff limited visits to the community to highly structured fact-finding missions, where they were introduced to specifically selected residents and remained at the site only for several hours. Samaritan's Purse staff remained living in Cholueca, and saw Limón as a place of employment and danger, and not as a place of residence. Samaritan's Purse volunteer groups followed this separation and did not gain personal knowledge of the reconstruction site like the CARITAS team and Manuel Fernandez. In the remainder of this chapter I will show how the representations of *damnificados* in Limón contributed to the enhancement of specific separations between subject and object, self and other. This

was a practice that enhanced a collection of agencies that resisted the attempts of *damnificados* to recover from a catastrophic event.

Electricity, Bounded Entities, and Technological Metaphors

For the purpose of analytical rigor, discussions of the roles of epistemes, discourses, and practices in the precipitation of crisis in disaster reconstruction must refrain from creating an essentialized beneficiary/donor dichotomy that portrays these players as monolithic entities vested with inherent and unalienable traits. At the same time, such an approach should not be interpreted as a declaration that the reconstruction world is a chaotic mixture of suspended narratives detached from politicized interests, material inequalities and privileged ways of knowing. Avoiding the reduction of *damnificados* and institutional actors to a singular form should not rule out the analysis of particular trends in community-agency-government interactions that produce problematic arrangements of resources and people. Although there is great variation within these three actor categories (aid workers, community residents, government officials), the recognition of this diversity should not preclude the recognition and outlining of processes of hierarchy formation, empowerment, and marginalization in postdisaster reconstruction.

In this ethnography I have attempted to develop a methodology inspired by the actor-network approach that does not assume the boundedness or prior homogeneous constitution of reconstruction actors as subjects, but follows the complex engagement of knowledges, subjectivities, resources, and politics that took place in Limón de la Cerca's creation. This approach avoids the simple essentialization of reconstruction actors while simultaneously making the operations of power that gave shape to Limón as a location of

crisis discernible. Furthermore, these operations had effects whose emergence followed specific patterns, and are therefore relevant objects of anthropological scrutiny. The case of the installation of electricity in Limón and Marcelino helps illustrate the complexity of reconstruction actors as well as the process by which these were essentialized, represented, and mobilized by other actors to achieve a variety of objectives ranging from the securing of political positions, the control of reconstruction resources, and the explanation of project failures. .

Riding in a CARITAS pick up truck on the way to the famous Carnival of San Marcos de Colon on an August night I saw Marcelino Champagnat from a distance. In the midst of a dark plain, the community stood out with its rows of neatly aligned light poles and bright shining lights. There was little activity in the dirt streets that rose and fell along small hills. As we drove eastward down the Pan-American Highway I looked to my left, expecting to see Limón de la Cerca. Removed from the highway, it was almost impossible to make out the community. Only the first houses of Colonia Panamericana were visible in the faint peripheral light of the truck's headlights. Farther along, somewhere close to Colonia Loma Linda, a single bulb announced the presence of the *Ciudad Nueva*. Had I not known what I was looking for, I would have never imagined that more than 4,000 people were sharing an uneasy sleep under the cover of darkness.

These conditions struck me as odd because funds (reportedly 9.5 million lempiras) had been disbursed by two international donors for the electrification of Limón de la Cerca. Furthermore, with a budget one third the size that of Limón, Marcelino Champagnat had already acquired what many claimed was the best electrification project

in Southern Honduras. On January 12, 2001 Manuel Fernandez explained how the project was carried out.

The Spanish government paid for the electrification. Three million lempiras, and we used good quality materials, '50' transformers, better than in any *colonia* of Choluteca. We hired an engineer and a company from Tegucigalpa. The *damnificados* opened the holes and put in the posts. We didn't have any problems. When everything was ready we went to the ENEE [the Honduran National Electric Company] and each home paid 150 lempiras to install the counter in each house. ENEE gave three months of free electricity to each house because everything was paid by international institutions. (Fieldnotes 2000)

The successful collaboration between Manuel Fernandez, community leaders, international governments, NGOs, and private and national companies is a critical element of disaster mitigation and community reconstruction. Berke et al. (1993) have noted how typologies of communities can be devised on the basis of the level and type of integration of disaster-affected communities. These typologies can, in turn, help us make predictions of the ways in which communities will react in disaster reconstruction situations. Communities that are well integrated both horizontally and vertically – meaning that they are internally cohesive and have close, empowered contacts with external agencies – will fare substantially better through reconstruction processes than those that are not. The model, however, does not consider how such levels of high or low integration come to be, and assumes an inherent hierarchic separation between levels of analysis (local, regional, global – vertical integration) that may not be the best means of interpreting the courses through which electrification project outcomes in Limón and Marcelino came to be so different. In Choluteca, the differences between these two communities materialized from an interactive and politicized process between hurricane-affected populations, governments, and aid agencies. This was not a simple case of

multiple, isolated binary oppositions where each community negotiated a specific relationship with external bodies.

Perhaps a more suited image is that of a network (Latour 1993), where the categories of local and global are reformulated as locations in an extensive system of multiple interconnections between populations and institutions. Along this network we see the movement of commodities, populations, technologies, information, and resources. The network, however, has rules, and not all commodities, people, and knowledge are equally free to move in any direction or with the same efficacy (Anderson 1996). The network has hierarchies and inequities that have colonialist, cold war, Eurocentric, capitalist, and enlightenment histories. The rules of the network are not fixed either, and, given the recruitment of the proper constituencies, they can be changed. Although they are mutable, these rules have weight, weight that is a product of narratives of transcendental orders of social, economic, and biological natures. This weight, in turn, operates as a resistance to transformations of the network's orders and movements.

Following Berke et al., in table 4-4 I have taken the liberty of categorizing Limón de la Cerca as a community with low horizontal and vertical integration (a categorization that I intend to challenge at the conclusion of this chapter). The implications that this ranking has for the community's residents is made evident by the stories told about the failed electrification of the reconstruction site. Despite the disbursement of sufficient funds for the electrification of Limón de la Cerca, the project remained unfinished during the length of this ethnographic study (July 2000-August 2001). In the Fall of 2000, the completion of the project was within the community's

grasp. The materials had been purchased and the residents had installed the posts and transformers. From the Pan-American highway passersby could see hundreds of

Table 4-4 Typology of disaster affected communities.

		<u>Horizontal Integration</u>	
		High	Low
<u>Vertical Integration</u>	High	Marcelino Champagnat	
	Low		Limon de la Cerca

wooden posts, but none of these were joined by cables. During the 2000 elections, political candidates of the two main national parties routinely used the final installation of electric cables as a campaigning tool. One candidate was so bold as to guarantee a date, November 20, by which electricity would be available. “If the electricity is not installed by then, don’t vote for me” he was rumored as having said. It was a bad political gamble, the day came and went, and Limón’s electric posts remained without cables.

In January 2001 the incompletion of the electrification project became a central theme during ethnographic interviews. The delay was due to a dispute over the payment of a tax levied on ENEE (Empresa Nacional de Energía Eléctrica/ National Electric Company) by the municipality for the use of public ways during cable installation. The tax was 50 (3.57 USD) Lempiras per post, and ENEE requested exoneration from payment (Figure 4-11). As a letter from ENEE’s office of public electrification indicates, the project was intended to be a collaboration between the Japanese government (funds),



EMPRESA NACIONAL DE ENERGIA ELECTRICA

TEGUCIGALPA, M.D.C., HONDURAS, C.A.

CABLE "ENEE"

APARTADO N° 99

Tegucigalpa 5 de Diciembre del 2000

Sr. Juan Benito Guevara
Alcalde Municipal
Choluteca, Choluteca

Estimado Alcalde

Por medio de la presente hago de su conocimiento que la Empresa Nacional De Energía Eléctrica esta realizando proyectos de electrificación con fondos del gobierno de Japón. Para lo cual es necesario el aporte de contraparte de la comunidad beneficiada; esta contraparte debe ser debidamente documentada, la cual detallamos a continuación:

1. Constancia de posesión de postes y crucetas
2. Contrato de mano de obra para instalación de materiales
- ③ Constancia de la alcaldía municipal de exoneración de impuestos por uso de vías publicas

Los incisos anteriores son requisitos indispensables para que la comunidad beneficiada proceda ha hacer el retiro de los materiales asignados para la construcción del sistema eléctrico.

Atentamente


Ing. Carlos Roberto Méndez S.
Oficina De Electrificación Social
ENEE

UNION: C.V.

EL MERCADO DE TRABAJO

Figure 4-11. National Electric Company (ENEE) letter to Choluteca municipality.

the community (labor), the electric company (cable installation) and the municipality (tax exemption). The mayor, however, refused to sign the exemption.

From the perspective of some institutional actors, the causes for the failed electrification project lay in the *damnificados* and their lack of what Berke calls horizontal integration. When asked why the installation of the cables had been delayed for so long, a Honduran Samaritan's Purse project manager replied:

It's an urbanization tax I think. The Mayor wants them to pay 50 lempiras per post. There's four posts per block, which adds up to 200 Lempiras per block and the people don't want to pay them. They're still with that thing that they are *damnificados*. They're waiting for another subsidy to come and pay for it. It's what we were talking about, they have it in their heads that they are *damnificados* and they need to stop thinking like that. (Fieldnotes 2000)

"What we were talking about before" is a reference to a conversation we had the prior week about *damnificado* dependency on assistance agencies. From this project manager's perspective, one of the primary challenges confronted by Limon residents was overcoming their dependence on external institutions. Without overcoming this side-effect of reconstruction a 'true' community would never develop. In contrast, Community leader and pulperia owner Rordrio Palencia presented a different appraisal of the situation:

"When we [Limón residents] want something we know how to work for it. We went from house to house, getting four-man work parties, and between four men we put in each post. They said we wouldn't get it done. We left them with their mouths open. What happens is that when something like what happened happens [the refusal of the mayor to grant a tax exemption] everyone loses it. The mayor says 'those from Limon are a bunch of delinquents' he doesn't even care about us. But the people here are hard workers. What we need are jobs, sources of work." (Fieldnotes 2000).

Another resident echoed his comments:

"...now the light is being held back by the mayor because he won't sign the release for the cables. He wanted us to pay 50 Lempiras for the installation of every post, but he hasn't contributed anything!" (Fieldnotes 2000)

Mr. Rosa's comments stand as a challenge to the categorization of Limón de la Cerca as a community with low horizontal integration. Throughout the ethnography I continuously questioned the presence of community bonds between *damnificados* in this location. Still, at critical moments, it seemed possible for those bonds to form. When asked to contribute their labor to the electrification project, the members of the community responded with enthusiasm. The request for payment of the urbanization task, however, was met with suspicion. Prior experiences with fund mismanagement and embezzlement made most residents cautious of paying fees for collective projects.

Concerning the electrification, a municipality development worker provided the final answer as he presented me with the famous letter written by an ENEE engineer to the municipality (Figure 4-11). In response to my query as to why the electrification had been delayed for so long, Julio Cantero responded:

The electrification has been politicized. The only thing that has been completed is the installation of the posts and the primary line. The ENEE has requested a document exonerating the payment for use of public ways, a tax requested by the municipality. The mayor didn't want to sign it. I don't know [why], because of politics he didn't want to sign it. (Fieldnotes 2001)

Beyond Choluteca, the nuances of this struggle were impossible to discern. After writing a paper for the Society for Applied Anthropology 2000 Annual Meeting on the political economy of reconstruction in Limón de la Cerca, I was contacted by an AID program director who strongly objected to any claims that the mayor of Choluteca had actively sought to marginalize certain sectors of the community leadership and had strategically used reconstruction projects for his political gain. On the basis of their personal acquaintance, he insisted that the mayor was a man of good repute, well-known for his commitment to successful disaster mitigation.

What is interesting about the electrification of Limón de la Cerca are the ways in which some representations of *damnificados* are mobilized (depended, non-integrated) in conjunction with material processes (delay of electrification project) in discursively productive ways, while contesting claims to representation (municipality corruption, Limón resident collaboration) are denied the same currency and mobility.

For a number of anthropologists (Douglas 1992, Esteva 1993, Gronemeyer 1993, Escobar 1995), this difference in mobility and currency is linked to a broader aesthetics of international assistance whose formulation is closely linked to the politics of giving in post Cold War late-capitalist strategizing for the creation of a New World Order. The words the Samaritan's purse project manager reveal a number of assumptions about the properties of disaster survivors that fit within this system of aesthetics and material practices. First among these assumptions is the notion that there is an adequate role that aid recipients must follow. A good recipient is a docile subject who accepts what is given, regardless whether the given good is intelligible or relevant in ontological and relational terms. The recipient must also collaborate in the process of giving (digging the holes for electric poles, paying urbanization taxes), learning the work ethic of the donor, and not questioning authoritative voices.

The comments also assume that bad recipients, or, in this case, those Limón residents who refuse to stop 'thinking as *damnificados*' have failed in meeting some or all of these criteria. In Limón however, those labeled as recipients in this equation strongly objected to this characterization. Many residents considered themselves hard workers willing to make great sacrifices to construct new communities. They saw the appropriation of resources by some NGO workers, community leaders and municipality

officials and their exclusion from reconstruction planning as the elements undermining horizontal integration. The rapid installation of the light posts was considered by many to be indicative of their ethic, and felt that the mayor's reluctance to grant the tax exoneration was yet another strategy to reassert his political position over the community.

The Samaritan's purse project manager saw the reluctance to pay the tax on the part of *damnificados* as a verification of his suspicion that the residents had become pathologically dependent on outside assistance. The residents, in contrast, saw their contribution in the form of labor to be an undeniable display of their ability and willingness to work towards reconstruction. In addition, they viewed the Mayor's refusal to sign the tax exoneration as retaliation for voicing their displeasure with his handling of the land purchase and distribution. Finally, as the anthropologist, I saw the refusal to pay the tax as an act of resistance indicative of a stronger sense of community and integration than previously suspected.

The story of the electrification of these two reconstruction sites shows the wide range of outcomes within the reconstruction practice in Southern Honduras. It would be a grave error to characterize reconstruction as a monolithic process of epistemological impositions and hierarchy formation that inevitably results in conditions of crisis. The efforts of CARITAS International, Manuel Fernandez and the residents of Marcelino Champagnat stand as an obvious example of effective collaboration between various actors. The acknowledgement of such variation, however, should not distract us from discussing other tendencies within this practice that can yield dramatically different results. Limón de la Cerca is a case in point. Development and reconstruction do not necessarily have to be equated with marginalization, environmental destruction,

ontological violence, and ideological colonization. However, in cases where differing performative realities and ontologies are excluded in reconstruction practice and ‘beneficiary’ priorities are made secondary to incongruent program objectives we may continue to witness the enhancement of agencies that severely constrain the capacity of disaster survivors to reconstruct their communities.

Commodifying *Damnificados*: Operation Christmas Child

As the case of Limón’s electrification illustrated, there is a pervasive notion in the reconstruction assistance world that beneficiaries should not profit from aid programs. In this economy of charity, the giver assumes an authoritative role, teaching the receiver that a good beneficiary is one that works collaboratively with assistance institutions, and never receives more than what she or he has lost. These assumptions become problematic when considering that all parties involved in the assistance world benefit politically and materially from this global production of need. Reconstruction assistance is productive of more than donated houses and grateful recipients; it is productive of institutions, channels of political influence, professions, and expert selves. The recognition of this production is not an indictment of international assistance, but is a necessity in the addressing of crucial problems in the recovery after Hurricane Mitch.

Figure 4-12 shows an excerpt from the Samaritan’s Purse website. It is an imagining of an ideal recipient, a beneficiary of Operation Christmas Child. The use of the child to imagine an ideal future where race is merely a chromatic difference, desires are equally shared amongst universal subjects, and the act of giving is a selfless and benevolent act is not coincidental. As Claudia Castañeda (2003) has aptly pointed out, figurations of children as either readily available adoptees whose race can be reduced to a

Operation Christmas Child

AUSTRALIA | CANADA | NETHERLANDS | UK & IRELAND | USA



Christmas in UGANDA



What is

Operation Christmas Child?

Operation Christmas Child sends a message of hope to children in desperate situations around the world through gift-filled shoe boxes and Christian literature. This program provides an opportunity for individuals of all ages to be involved in a simple, hands-on missions project that reaches out to suffering children while focusing on the true meaning of Christmas—Jesus Christ, God's greatest gift. In 2001, we collected over 5 million shoe boxes worldwide and distributed them to children in about 95 countries.

Need to know how to pack a shoe box?



Media Links

Operation Christmas Child

Members of the Media will find other related news and information about Operation Christmas Child on our media site.



Figure 4-12 Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child Web page. Source: <http://www.samaritanpurse.org/index.asp?section=Operation+Christmas+Child>

mere difference in skin color or, as in this case, as grateful and consumable recipients of North American charity, have the capacity to create imaginings that mask systems of imposed difference and privilege and refashion racial and colonialist hierarchies.

Through this image, Christmas and the act of giving are de-politicized and de-historicized, an act that is fundamental to the establishment of assistance hierarchies.

Unfortunately, the militaristic allusion of the project's title is highly appropriate.

Operation Christmas Child is an international endeavor, where toy donations from North America make their way to the hands of needy children around the world. In the process of giving, global structures of dominance and power centralization are reinforced as recipients are commodified, and marketed by assistance institutions and consumed by charitable North Americans.

Operation Christmas child came to Limón de la Cerca more than two months after Christmas. Prior to its arrival, agency volunteers and workers had distributed ticket stubs – one per household – that could be exchanged for the famous gift-filled shoeboxes. On a windy spring Saturday, Samaritan's purse workers announced that the toys were finally on their way from San Pedro Sula. The convoy featured not only the much-desired toys, but two tour busses carrying North American missionaries and the agency's national director. One child from each household was to report to the *plantel* (a fenced area devoted to NGO events) with her or his ticket.

Children began arriving around 10 a.m., where Samaritan's Purse volunteers and Honduran Army soldiers met them at the gates. The soldiers fashioned unloaded assault rifles strapped across their chests. There would be no food riots while the national

director of Samaritan's Purse visited Limón de la Cerca. On the other side of the *plantel's* fence, mothers and siblings waited anxiously for the event to begin.

By the early afternoon, the toys had not arrived. Parents, sisters and brothers clung to the chain link fence surrounding the small plaza, some growing impatient because the children had not eaten. When children on the other side of the fence tried to approach their siblings and parents, they were quickly shooed away by the soldiers. On orders from the local Samaritan's Purse coordinator, they were to prevent the passing of tickets stubs from one side of the fence to the other. Finally, after several hours of waiting, the North American Samaritan's Purse delegation arrived. It was no small production. They were preceded by a small group of mission workers who set up a video camera tripod on the roof of a tour bus. They were accompanied by Samaritan's Purse national director, a US citizen who, on previous years, worked as one of Senator Jesse Helms' assistants in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The director's spouse was a Honduran military officer who had, on several occasions, sought a nomination for the presidential candidacy by one of the country's two major political parties.

In the *plantel's* central structure, a stage covered by a large, gymnasium-style roof, the director spoke into a microphone. "Everyone welcome uncle Carl [a Samaritan's Purse worker] and the Gringos from Gringolandia! Here come the Gringos from Gringolandia! Have any of you ever been to Gringolandia?!" No one responded.

The shoebox distribution proceeded as a highly structured event. After words from the national director, a local military commander, and several missionaries, the shoeboxes were distributed. Children, spatially and symbolically separated from their parents and mothers, walked down the *plantel's* center aisle toward the main stage and

exchanged their ticket stubs for the shoeboxes. The process was captured by video cameras whose lenses remained aimed towards the center stage, effectively editing the mass of spectators that struggled to see the proceedings from the perimeter's fence. Once fetishized, the images would resemble those of the operation's web page. The child is figured as the epitome of the beneficiary, removed from structures that label it as marginal and dangerous and mobilize it to produce political careers, sustain institutions, and secure networks of influence.

The narrations of home construction, electricity installation, and gift distribution in Limón de la Cerca reveal the close and inseparable connection of discourse and practice in Honduras' reconstruction after Hurricane Mitch. The presentation of the connection between cultural narratives and imaginings of social and economic natures by reconstruction program managers are not intended to demonstrate a failure among these actors to think and act in an adiscursive space where proper reconstruction could take place. Tropes, metaphors, figurations, imaginings, and semiotic-material practices are those things that compose human realities and make the world at large intelligible and navigable for both aid agency managers and disaster survivors. At the same time, the case of Marcelino Champagnat demonstrates that the components of semiotic-material practices are located, with particular histories that make them readable and functional. These components are by no means universal, and their becoming so is an act of ontological politics and not a reflection of the inherent properties of objects. Housing reconstruction in Marcelino Champagnat also shows the malleability of performative realities and offers substantial possibilities for reconstruction practices where natures are

contestable and conditions of alterity can manifest in forms that are conducive to the creation of cultural commensurability.

CHAPTER 5

CONVERSATIONS WITH DAMNIFICADOS

In the previous chapter I followed the trajectories of three reconstruction assistance projects as a narrative means of understanding how the distribution of aid in Limón de la Cerca took on patterns whose intelligibility and efficacy was routinely questioned by community residents. These patterns were not a collection of mere linguistic utterances. Instead, they were material effects of the violence that erupted at the location where reconstruction actors with their discourses, practices, politics, ontologies, needs, and desires encountered one another in the reconstruction of this community. For the purposes of this discussion, I find it appropriate to imagine these elements (discourses, practices, politics etc.) as vector forces, sometimes traveling along parallel trajectories, sometimes in different directions, and sometimes moving in altogether different axes and therefore maintaining tensions between one another.

To avoid succumbing to a reductionist tendency, I do not grant any of these elements precedence as an ultimate cause in the making of reality in this reconstruction site. However, because of their demonstrated capacity to produce resistance to the desires of disaster survivors, to the best laid plans of agency workers, to the idealized hopes for mitigation of anthropologists, I consider them to be real forces in the reconstruction encounter (Latour 1988).

In this same model, the term violence is not used in a strictly pejorative way, although such a use is also not precluded. Violence is simply used as a heuristic device to speak of one of the products of the work that it takes to move these elements along with

their associated actors in a general trajectory. Violence is used in an ambiguous fashion because the work that it is a product of may, in some instances, take the form of alliance-making, the silencing of certain voices or ideas in others, or even the forceful displacement of bodies, and arbitrary distribution of resources. In Limón de la Cerca, the general trajectory that I write about took the form of the construction of houses that collapsed under the pressure of strong winds and that were too small for families to live in or remained uninhabited, the disruption of neighborhood relational networks, the proliferation of street gangs, and the delay in the completion of an electrification project.

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that the trajectory of reconstruction in Limón de la Cerca resulted in the making of a locality where residents saw their capacity to “exercise freely such possibilities as” they have, to give themselves “an environment in which” they live “a form of reason that would make everyday existence readable” severely limited (Mbembe 2001). At the same time, I have observed caution in claiming that such limitations emerged from a monistic and linear discursive deployment. Modernity, as a bounded conscious subject, or a fully realized epistemic imaginary cannot be so easily blamed (Appadurai 1996), although appeals to its associated and ever transforming narratives are an element to consider in the making of such unintelligibilities.

Experts and reconstruction agency workers cannot be used as convenient scapegoats either. Doing so ignores the complex matrix of benevolent intentions, political contestations, discursive sequences of reasoning, personal and institutional self interests, program requirements and logistical exigencies that comprise the mangle from which these actors make decisions as to how to carry out reconstruction. These actors can also

not be subsumed under a single category, as their personal histories vary considerably, as do their intentions, desires, capacities and realities. At the same time, as I demonstrated in chapter 3, this complexity does not limit the possibility of noting the processes by which certain unintelligibilities in disaster reconstruction came about in Limón de la Cerca. Also, it does not close off the possibility of making recommendations for systems of practice that lessen the effects of such processes.

As noted above, discourse is one of the elements that concerns me, but to assume that it is a dominating force that invariably results in certain outcomes dismisses the complex ways in which people, regardless of their location, synthesize knowledge-practices with very different genealogies (Scheid 2002), do not neatly assume the categories that discourses would have them assigned to (McNay 1993), and resist practices that challenge their ontological or political interests.

What is it that is going on in Limón de la Cerca then? How are people living in this locality, with its discursive disjunctures, its political tensions and contestable representations? As I mentioned in the introduction to this text, the lives of disaster survivors did not come to a dramatic halt as a result of the crisis in reconstruction that I am concerned with. This crisis was also not a totalizing force that deprived them of all agency and dominated every aspect of their lives. Nonetheless, I insist on referring to the multiple unintelligibilities and limitations experienced by the residents of Limón de la Cerca as a crisis. Well then, where is this crisis that I continue to refer to and which is neither totalizing nor unproblematic? How is it that people can continue to live through it, yet see their capacities to make their everyday experience readable curtailed? Is it not

supposed to be one or the other, crisis or no crisis, agency or no agency, victimhood or no victimhood?

In this chapter I will use transcriptions from ethnographic interviews conducted with residents of Limón de la Cerca to dismiss the dichotomous choice of crisis or no crisis, allowing for the problematization of those conditions and practices that disaster survivors found disadvantageous and the understanding of the reasons why they did so. I will also use these transcriptions to avoid the tendency to create neatly bounded entities that encase disaster survivors as good, traditional, victims, and, by implication, relief workers as bad, modern dominators. Such a reluctance to close off disaster survivors serves multiple purposes. First, it challenges the tropes whose appeals to I consider a primary element in the precipitation of this crisis. Second, it permits for the consideration of approaches to group identities that do not rely on originary essences or cultures, and, third, it opens up possibilities for understanding how constituencies of difference are formed. This third topic will be further addressed in chapter 6.

The following transcription excerpts should demonstrate the things people do in their daily lives in Limón de la Cerca, the limitations they confront as a result of the materialization of unintelligibilities in disaster reconstruction, the ways they cope with these, and the ways they contest institutional assessments of their community that proclaim the realization of reconstruction. The excerpts will also show people who do not find disaster assistance undesirable, who do not adhere to strict dichotomies of global or local, modern or traditional, but who do contest the politics of knowledge that limit their possibilities to structure reality in a way that they find meaningful and advantageous.

Delving into the ways people in Limón de la Cerca speak about their daily lives, I hope to showcase the reality that this dissertation is concerned with, and to prove that this ethnography is not merely concerned with the anecdotal. In the following transcriptions we will see people doing things and we will also see the resistance of things –be they discourses or cinder blocks-, demonstrating that “post” approaches are concerned with more than the simply symbolic.

Resistance is an important part of the analytical framework that I want to follow in the reading of these transcriptions. By resistance I mean the way in which certain arrangements of agents (houses, people, electricity poles) inhibit the possibilities of Limón residents to realize, if at least in part, their imaginaries of household and community life. The resistances that are of relevance to this dissertation will manifest in the form of single room houses whose arrangement of living quarters seem illogical to disaster survivors, the incompleteness of an electrification project and the continued state of darkness in the community during nighttime hours, the disintegration of neighborhood networks and the subsequent proliferation of streetgangs, and the difficulty of finding assistance with child care among strangers.

Just as I am interested in the resistances that Limón residents confront as part of their experience as disaster survivors, I am also interested in the processes through which they make accommodations to such resistances and they attempt to make life understandable in this locality. How do people interact with the resistances to their daily activities that emerged in the process of reconstruction? Which of these resistances do they overcome, if at least partially, and how? Which of these resistances could be easily neutralized through modifications to reconstruction practice in Limón? By posing

questions in terms of resistance and accommodation and the specificity of the activities of agents in the reconstruction encounter I attempt to approach the ethnography of disaster reconstruction through an analytical framework inspired by Bruno Latour's actor network and Andrew Pickering's mangle of practice. Both of these frameworks are designed to avoid the reduction of any process to a singular causing agent, like discourse, and emphasize an empirical approach that takes into account the complexity of reconstruction encounters where people, knowledges and resources engage one another in intricate, fluid, and sometimes paradoxical ways.

The examples that follow will hopefully incite the lector to think of the locations and means of anthropological praxis that could help alleviate the effects of unnecessary resistances, keeping in mind that the antiquated notion of the circumscribed community no longer serves as the sole site of intervention. At the same time, these transcriptions will explode the notion of the disaster survivor as a unitary subject who can be easily silenced and spoken for in the politics of reconstruction.

Concepción: The realities of incommensurability in disaster reconstruction

On April 27, 2001, Concepción Rodríguez, a 34 year old resident of Limón de la Cerca sat down to talk with me about her life in the reconstruction community. Prior to the hurricane, she lived with her husband and five children in Barrio Buenos Aires of Choluteca. On the day of our interview I found her in Colonia Santa Fé of the reconstruction site. The transcription begins with her response to my questions concerning the changes she has experienced in her daily activities since she moved with her family to the reconstruction site.

Roberto Barrios: and what do you work on, what kind of work do you do?

Concepción Rodríguez: no, I work here in the house, watching the children. I don't work.

RB: and before the hurricane, did you work outside the home?

CR: yes, I did work

RB: what kind of work did you do?

CR: oh, well, at the market, selling.

RB: what types of things did you sell?

CR: I sold tortillas

RB: and why not now?

CR: now I don't sell because I am afraid of leaving the children, leaving the children alone, because here there are many delinquents.

RB: when you lived in Barrio Buenos Aires, how did you manage with the children?

CR: ah, there, nearby, the neighbors took care of them.

RB: and now, do you have any neighbors that can take care of them?

CR: no.

RB: your new neighbors, here, are they people you knew from before?

CR: no, I don't know anybody here

RB: And how are you getting along with them? Do you not feel trust with them yet?

CR: oh yes, we now have a little trust with the neighbor on this side. With her I have trust and with a neighbor over here, an old lady, we have trust with her.

RB: but not enough to leave your children?

CR: no, you know, no.

Concepción's answers begin to give some texture to the locality of this study. She tells us about some of the practices she engages in: childcare and the sale of tortillas. She also tells us about the types of resistances she encounters in this new environment. There are many delinquents, a reminder of the extensive *mara* activity mentioned in the previous chapter, and she does not know her neighbors well enough to trust them with childcare. Concepción's responses show us real changes in her lifestyle and real logistical complications, but it is my thesis that these resistances are taking form in the liminal spaces that lie between the subjectivities of disaster survivors, their performative realities, and reconstruction practices whose logic was not self evident to community residents.

In chapter 3 I discussed how the distribution of land parcels in Limón de la Cerca was conducted in a randomized fashion, breaking ties between old neighborhood

networks. The randomized distribution of *solares* can only be considered logical if we assume that disaster survivors are alienated subjects who are best served if they are left to individually maximize the gains of a minimal investment (the 200 square foot *solar*).

Associated with this assumption is the notion that residents will quickly become trustful neighbors, they are, after all, all *damnificados*. But, contrary to the notion that such group identities are readily evident, the complexities of identity politics will not have constituencies form so easily (Appadurai 1996, Bhabha 1994). Despite her acquaintance with other residents, Concepción is still reluctant to leave her children to their care. Delinquency, an activity that allegedly proliferated with the dissolution of neighborly ties, also makes her apprehensive about the safety of her family. Our conversation continues:

RB: how do you manage, now that you can't sell at the market, how does that affect the economy of your home?

RESP: I miss it, yes, I miss it, because it's not the same thing as one working, helping your partner. Now it's only him, he's the sole head (*cabecilla*), he now maintains us, and before I helped him, but now it's only him that looks after us.

RB: and how does that affect your home? How has it changed your home situation since he's the only one that works for money?

RESP: no, you feel more, em...well, different, not anymore, it's not the same.

Concepción's responses briefly introduce the gendered effects of reconstruction in Limón de la Cerca. Although her comments are short, I hope that her words will resonate in the transcriptions that follow. Concepción says that she feels different, that the relationship with her partner is somehow altered by the fact that he is now the sole *cabecilla*, head of household. The alteration of this relationship is linked in her narrative to the widespread delinquency of the reconstruction site and the difficulties she experiences finding help with childcare so she can sell tortillas. Most importantly, these

complications are associated with specific reconstruction practices like the random distribution of land parcels and the associated dissolution of neighbor networks.

The gendered effects alluded to by Concepción, and which are further elaborated on in the transcriptions that follow, do not manifest themselves on a barren terrain. Instead, they are mediated on the basis of preexisting relations between Concepción, her husband, her children, and her neighbors. In the reconstruction site, however, there are new agents at play in this relational matrix. These agents surface in Concepción's narrative in the form of delinquents, unknown neighbors and the seven kilometers that separate the reconstruction site from Choltueca, where most Limón residents look for work. These agents, in turn, are products of those disjunctures between reconstruction practices and the ontologies of actors and objects in this locality. These are disjunctures that mark the trajectory of the construction of a community whose landscape challenges the capacity of its residents to "make everyday life existence readable."

The intelligibility that I refer to involves the simple act of being able to travel to Choluteca, seek work, and re-establish a position as *cabecilla* in the household. It is also important to note that, in writing about the notion of the intelligibility of the reconstruction zone, I write about the ontology of objects and human relations, as these compose the signs and things upon which people structure their lives and make sense of their worlds.

As the words of other Limón residents will suggest, the relations between Concepción and her old neighbors could be said to have an ontological property. It was through these relations that Concepción developed a sense of place, community and subjectivity, and realized her possibilities for action (seeking work, finding assistance

with child care). In light of these comments, the raffling of land parcels becomes a disjunctive practice because it fails to consider the existence and profound relevance of these relations.

In Concepción's comments incommensurability is more than a linguistic mistranslation, it is a contestable reality laden with difficulties and resistances. The following transcriptions will show that other Limón de la Cerca residents also share her sentiments.

Maria Elvira and Carlos Maradiaga: Agency, resistances and contested realities

On May 3, 2001, Maria Elvira Maradiaga and her father, Carlos Maradiaga, tried to give me some perspective on their life in Limón de la Cerca. We spoke in their house, which resembled that of the majority of residents in this reconstruction site. The single room structure was sparsely adorned. Two wooden beds were arranged against the walls to make the most of the available space. One wood table covered with a plastic tablecloth provided the center for housekeeping activities. An assortment of plastic dishes, frying pans and bowls covered it's top. Adjacent was a small wooden cabinet with glass doors (*chinero*) where important documents, medicines and prized belongings were kept. Outside, in a *champa* (temporary structure made of wood beams and plastic sheeting), two young women were helping Maria Elvira make tortillas for sale in the town market.

Roberto Barrios: you were telling me that your situation is critical? Why do you say that?

Maria Elvira Maradiaga (MEM): because here everything...you have to see how you're going to eat, and there is so much work, and sometimes work doesn't work out! Because I sell tortillas, and there are days when I come back with [makes gesture of large pile] of tortillas. I pull hard here, not like when we were in Choluteca Even for firewood...

Carlos Maradiaga (CM): and it is a long way.

MEM: how long it is, here we have to pay bus fare, and at least over there in Choluteca we were close to the market, we went on foot, and not here, and here you can't even wake up before dawn, we are afraid.

RB: how are you afraid?

MEM: so much *mara* that there is here.

RB: then when it's dark you don't...

MEM: well, look, there's no light!

RB: how is the light situation? Have they told you when they'll put it in?

MEM: nah.

RB: they said it would done by November

MEM: no, look at how the sewage project is going, how must the electricity be?

CM: look, because here, even this daughter of mine, she gets up, she wants to work, she wants to work, but alone she can't, she can't. She has to look for someone here in the house so they can go in the night, in the darkness to the mill. Alone she can't go, because they could come out, because here the *maras* hang out. You should see how they go, yes, there, then they can take the, the maize bucket, they can dump it and, well, they can hurt her, and she, by herself, she can't, then those things one sees. There is, there is necessity.

In our conversation, Maria Elvira and Carlos sustain the notion that Limón residents are experiencing a collection of resistances whose cumulative effect threatens their capacity to carry out their mundane tasks. Maria Elvira sells tortillas for a living, an occupation that requires the labor of other household members as well. The difficulties she confronts have not necessarily brought her involvement in this economic activity to a dramatic halt, but the threat of violence at the hands of streetgangs, the increased danger of such violence during the early morning darkness, and the complications of travel to and from Choluteca are difficulties that Maria Elvira and Carlos contest as unavoidable outcomes of the reconstruction. Maria Elvira's comment "look at how the sewage project is going, how must the electricity be!" is an allusion to the complex weaving of the various forms of politics (of NGOs, of representation, of knowledge, of local governments and disaster survivors) that comprise the trajectories of reconstruction programs.

Maria Elvira and Carlos's comments also bring up the issue of the ontology of objects in disaster reconstruction. Maria Elvira's vending of tortillas is now complicated by the need to use public transportation to reach the town market, a location that was previously accessible by foot. But the distance that separates her from the town market cannot be simply measured in terms of meters or miles. This specific scape is a perspectival locality (Appadurai 1996) whose reality is contingent on the particular position from which the subject engages it. While the 7 kilometers that separate the reconstruction site from the town in the maps of anthropologists (see chapter 2) are allegedly the same 7 kilometers that roll over in the odometers of AID late model trucks that carry visiting program evaluators in the comfort of air conditioned interiors, for Limón residents this object has a dramatically different nature.

During this ethnographic study, the 7 kilometers that separated Choluteca from Limón de la Cerca remained a gendered terrain whose crossing became particularly difficult for women. During the period of research, adult women were never observed traveling through this space on bicycles, while male residents made frequent use of bicycles as an alternative means of transportation to buses. Traveling in the motorized vehicles of assistance agencies, these same 7 kilometers seemed picturesque, adorned by nearby mountains and a semi arid environment. For Limón residents traveling on foot or on bicycles, however, this stretch of road was known as a place of danger where assaults by *maras* were common.

As Concepción mentioned in the preceding section, she now feels different from before. The respective alteration and severance of relations with her partner and neighbors, her simultaneous marginalization and participation in the reconstruction

processes that made her new place of residence dangerous, and her limited ability to engage in economic activity in Choluteca are transforming the way she thinks about herself and the way she is perceived by others as a subject. In a similar way, Carlos's narrative makes the profound effects of reconstruction in Limón surface in the transcription that follows. This time he speaks of a recent confrontation he witnessed between his daughter and a group of *mareros*. The gang members suspected she had denounced them before local authorities and visited their home with the intention of attaining retribution:

CM: Because look, one time, one of them, right here, they gave me this big story that she had gone to, that she had gone to report them, those that were in the *mara*. And she, and she wouldn't even go out because she was scared. Well they came here. Look, some people, and such men, to question her. Then, I say 'and what am I going to do, getting involved, going, going to declare when I don't even know you', they told her 'but you are the one who went', since there is proof, look! That is what happens. Then they came and lashed her, then they lashed her. Then that is how that is. One in his home, and you think you are safe, and they said, 'if we knew who that person was, we would burn her.' Imagine, like that, all those things give you fear. All that, I say, you can't, you can't say anything. Those machetes do much harm. Because, look, here they came, about four or five people like that to ask her questions and like that, and the questions give you fear of what they want to know, what they want, luckily they didn't do anything to her.

In Carlos' narrative, the *mara* is an agent capable of influencing the way he thinks about himself in his new place of residence; namely, terrorized. Furthermore, the *mara*, as we see it in this narration, is not a given outcome of the reconstruction process, but is an agent that emerged in the places of disjuncture between reconstruction practices and the performative realities of disaster survivors. As we saw in chapter 3, the raffling of land parcels disrupted neighborhood networks, anonymity between new neighbors permitted gang activity to increase, and the darkness perpetuated by an uncompleted

electrification project amplified the spaces where such activities could further displace themselves.

As they speak about their lives, Maria Elvira and Carlos also challenge their representation as passive victims. Despite the ongoing crisis in Limón de la Cerca, the disaster that is perpetuated through the reconstruction of this locality has not unilaterally dominated their lives. Despite the multiple complications she faces, Maria Elvira continues to sell tortillas at the town market, sometimes with success and sometimes facing financial loss. Their comments add an interesting twist to the recognition of the agency of disaster survivors, as they suggest that acknowledging the presence of such agency does not necessarily negate the possibility of speaking critically about those broad processes (the delay of electrification, the raffling of land parcels, the inadequate construction of homes) that create unnecessary, excessive, and avoidable resistances in their lives.

Hallarse: To Find Oneself

José Luis Molina lived with his partner, children and extended family in Barrio La Cruz prior to Hurricane Mitch. Barrio La Cruz takes its name from an adorned cross erected in a small park that marks the southern extreme of the Choluteca river bridge. The cross is painted white and blue, and rises from a small green patch that is surrounded by a low concrete border and a metal fence. During the hurricane's flooding the park was covered with mud deposited by the river. Two years after the storm and after countless hours of work by volunteer clean up crews, the dilapidated park has resumed its pre disaster function of serving as a venue where people go out on dates, go out for relaxing strolls, and take pictures with the river and the bridge in the background.

Unlike the neighborhoods of Iztoca and Las Arenas, Barrio La Cruz was not completely destroyed by the flooding. Many longtime residents remain living there, but there are also ruins of houses that were buried in mud and whose walls were partially washed away by the river's waters. In contrast to the comments of some aid agency workers, I never considered Barrio La Cruz to be a marginal neighborhood of Choluteca. La Cruz was not known for *mara* activity, it was one of the oldest neighborhoods of the town, and contained a mixture of adobe homes and concrete homes.

At the time of our interview, José Luis lived in Colonia Samaritana with his partner, Maribel, their children, his mother and brother. A few days prior to our conversation, Maribel was hit by a car as she stepped out of a public bus. During our interview she lay on a small wooden bed next to us, with her hip and leg severely bruised. The cinder brick walls, like those of the majority of houses in Limón, were not plastered. They remained bare, giving the room a drab feel. A hammock cut the space diagonally in half. We spoke inside the single room home, taking advantage of the shade during the midday hours. It was a bright and hot day, and the sun shone through the house's door, making a stark contrast to the dim interior.

ROBERTO BARRIOS (RB): I wanted to talk about your life here in Limón. I wanted to know how things have changed since you came to live here.

JOSE LUIS (JL): Well, we lived better in Choluteca. We had our house there, it was there already. That's where we were born and raised. In barrio La Cruz, where we lived, but because we came to seek shelter here, without wanting to. Look, that bandit hurricane, isn't it that it took the house and it left us on the street? And well, and here, it's that, here I don't find myself (*poco me hallo*), but what is one to do, you have to stay.

RB: Why do you not find yourself here?

JL: One is used to, like I told you, we were born over there, over there in barrio La Cruz we found ourselves more (*estabamos mas hallados*), but because the river took our house we had to come here. Although we may not like it, we have to be [here]. My mother doesn't like it here

MOTHER (M): I don't like it here.

JL: I tell her 'you have to make an effort.'

M: Here, you die at night

JL: You die, from here, that you make it to the hospital, you die.

M: If you don't have the two pesos to pay for the bus, you die.

JL: If you can't pay for the bus you die. And who's going to take you from here?

RB: yes, because the buses don't run ...

JL: nooo, at night they don't run. Until 9 at night. Then they stop running

Jose Luis' comments bring up the concept of *hallarse*, the notion of finding oneself at ease, in comfort and familiarity in his place of residence. Both Jose Luis and his mother feel that they do not yet have such a feeling of wellness in the reconstruction site, and they offer the example of the limited bus schedule and the complications it may cause in case of an emergency as an example of why they can't "find themselves" in Limón de la Cerca. As our conversation continues, Jose Luis suggests that the reasons he does not feel *hallado* are not limited to the early cessation of bus service, and links his failure to *hallarse* to the imagining of the community by various actors in the reconstruction process as a place inhabited by alienated subjects who are best left alone to maximize minimal investments. Jose Luis, on the other hand, finds himself limited in fulfilling those possibilities that emerge from his own imagination, materializing for us yet another critical disjuncture in the reconstruction of this community. Below, Jose Luis responds to my question concerning his state of relations with other neighbors, and indicates that his feeling of unease does not stem from an absence of neighborly relations, but from his incapacity to create a living space that is familiar and functional.

JL: Yes, yes, we always get along with the rest of the neighbors. The thing is that it's not enough [the land parcel]. We're between two empty lots, and they don't want to sell us another lot. They say no, that you can't have two lots, and I say, what they want is the money. These little lots, they're very little. Look, from that post to the other post...small. The ones they gave out in Manuel Fernandez [Marcelino Champagnat] are larger. It's that, over there, they are very large, in that *colonia* they have progressed, look, there's light over there, and even potable water and everything, look.

MOTHER: and here, nothing!

JL: and not here. Imagine. Everyday, I pull a cart of water. Until now they come around saying that they are going to put in water and that we have to pay 200 pesos. I tell her that this is good. They say that we have to pay 200 pesos and that we don't have to start digging ditches or anything. That's good. [a reference to a group of residents that offer to link houses to the public faucets for a minimal fee]

RB: and who said you could not buy another *solar*?

JL: yes, we can buy it, we want to buy it, but, because they say we can't buy it. They say you can only have one. And it's the president, the woman that came. We've told her we want to buy another lot, and she says that no, that you can't have another lot, that you can only have one. Look at that one in the Panamericana, she has three lots, look at the big solar she has. Better yet, she's building another house there.

BROTHER (B): that one's pretty

JL: I wish I could buy another one, to make this *solar* bigger. Imagine, that one day I may have money and I want to build a small room to rent, where am I going to build it if nothing fits here. Here you can't fit another room if you want to build it, these lots are very little.

M: This lot is very little

B: This solar is 10 by 20 [meters]

JL: isn't it that the ones in Manuel Fernandez are much bigger?

Explaining why he can't *hallarse* in the reconstruction site, Jose Luis begins to talk about the resistances he encounters as he tries to transform his *solar* in Limón de la Cerca into an intelligible space. Intelligibility, in his case, is a larger lot, comparable to those of Marcelino Champagnat (proving that his desire is not necessarily unreasonable), where he may build extensions to the single room house he shares with his family. In his case, resistance to his imagination comes in the form of a fellow disaster survivor, the president of the *colonia*, who insists on adhering to the municipality's stipulation that residents own no more than one lot.

In this instance, the tension between Jose Luis and the neighborhood president recreates the reconstruction encounter at a smaller scale. There are resources to be distributed (land parcels) and various actors at work (a beneficiary, a neighborhood president). Jose Luis plays the role of beneficiary, with his particular imaginary

concerning the desirable form of reconstruction, but there is a disjuncture between his imaginary and a narrative concerning the transcendental reality of subjects (the alienated, minimal investing, maximizing, rational choice maker) that has been invoked at critical moments during the reconstruction of the community.

The neighborhood president is confronted with a decision. She must decide whether to facilitate Jose Luis' quest for the ability to *hallarse*, or to negate his desire through an appeal to this narrative. She chooses the latter, but the narrative's stipulations are not enforced with an even hand in the reconstruction site. Jose Luis and his brother tell us that another neighbor has managed to buy more than one *solar*, hinting at the intimate relationship between the politics of knowledge and the politics of reconstruction in the shaping of Limón's reality.

Below, Jose Luis continues our conversation, explaining why he decided to stay in Limón de la Cerca instead of moving to Marcelino Champagnat when the two communities seceded in 1999:

JL: I don't know, we decided to stay here, believing that this thing would progress, and, well, nothing. Look at these houses how they made them. These houses were not [meant to be] this way. For the money they sent, these houses were not like this. That they have one single *cajon* [box], but no, they were good houses. Well, look, the houses are prettier where doña Vilma lives. Those houses, with metal doors and divided rooms, and here, just with one *cajon*! Look at that tin roof, if we didn't have all those rocks up there the wind would've lifted it by now.

RB: it's a little dangerous isn't it, because there's a few roofs that have been blown off.

JL: like that! These [houses] were not like this, they were better, the ones they were going to build here.

Speaking about the architectural design of his house, Jose Luis expresses his frustrations with the outcome of the housing reconstruction project he benefited from . There is an unresolved tension in his frustration as he has been an active participant in the

shaping of the reality that he now finds contestable. He, like other beneficiaries of the housing construction projects, participated in the building of houses in Limón de la Cerca where the majority of manual labor was provided by the *damnificados*. He also made the choice to remain in Limón de la Cerca when a group of neighborhood leaders seceded and founded Marcelino Champagnat. Jose Luis is therefore not a passive victim, but an active agent in the making of this locality. His agency and participation, however, do not discount the fact that the conditions that have materialized in his new place of residence, and the narratives invoked in the justification and reiteration of those conditions, continually resist his attempt to carry out such possibilities he considers necessary to create the sentiment of *hallarse*.

Jose Luis's contestations are presented in the form of his objections to the housing design. The 25 m² single room is not an adequate spatial arrangement for his family to live in. The tin roofs are not securely attached to the house, and they pose a risk to residents when strong winds lift them off their anchors. In the same conversation he makes a reference to doña Vilma, who lives in Colonia Francesa, where houses were constructed with internal divisions, tile roofs, and metal doors, suggesting that it was possible to create assistance packages that were more legible to Limón residents.

The making of *hallarse* into a tangible reality involves more than the specification of the dimensions of a land parcels and houses. It involves the capacity to act out, if at least in a partial way, some elements of Jose Luis' imaginary. In the transcription below, for example, *hallarse* takes the form of a locality where alienated subjects become neighbors whose doors remain open during festive times. In this case, the festive time is Christmas, and the resistance to Jose Luis' imagination takes the form of an

electrification project that remained without completion in December of 2000. Because the town mayor had refused to sign the national electric company's request for tax exemption and *maras* continued to roam through the community at night with impunity, the residents of Limón de la Cerca closed their doors at an early hour on December 24th. For Jose Luis, this should be a time when neighbors walked from house to house and unexpectedly visit one another as he visualizes this as an important element in the creation of a sense of place, but *Noche Buena* (Christmas Eve) of 2000 was, unfortunately, a silent night for many *damnificados*.

JL: here, they said that by the 24th there would be light, but then they didn't work, they said that...

M: they didn't have the [mayor's] signature...did he sign yet?

B: the cables are just there

JL: look, the cables, they haven't put them up

M: it's only noise and nothing. Look, once we get potable water, sewage and lighting, it'll be pretty here.

B: yeah, man.

RESP: On the 24th, we went to bed at 9 because for what [stay up] then? You couldn't see a single open door at night here, all the people locked up in their houses.

Dania Lisette and Reynaldo Alberto

Throughout this chapter I have used the transcriptions of interviews with residents from Limón de la Cerca to argue that, during the period of this ethnography, this was a location mired by multiple unintelligibilities and resistances that were engendered within the mangle of politics, practices and discourses we call postdisaster community reconstruction. These unintelligibilities and resistances were a manifestation of a disjuncture in disaster mitigation created by the projection of multiple narratives concerning certain assumed universalities of subjects and objects upon the complex landscape of *damnificado* subjectivities.

These projections took the form of practices that created a reconstruction site whose contours were, at times, illegible to *damnificados*. This illegibility was not the result of a deficiency among community residents, but was the product of multiple attempts to structure a reality upon ontologies that were not shared by the multiple actors in the reconstruction process. Furthermore, the projections that I write about were performed by actors ranging from national program directors of major assistance agencies to community residents, all of which used their appeals to these narratives to secure specific relational positions as benevolent experts, impartial neighborhood leaders or authoritarian municipality officials

Simultaneously I have argued against the assumption that there was a singular discursive deployment in Limón de la Cerca that unidirectionally shaped the reality of this location. To make such a claim would involve the denial of the resistances, participation, translations and subversions that all such deployments involve (Scheid 2002, McNay 1993, Appadurai 1996). The Limón residents whose stories and commentaries I have featured in this chapter all participated in the reconstruction of the community, assumed the category of *damnificado* in order to attain aid, lived in the research site, did the best they could with the available resources to gain a sense of normalcy, and contested policies and practices that resisted their attempts to formulate an intelligible form of mitigation.

In following this approach to the analysis of a crisis, I have also maintained that the acknowledgement of the agency and participation of subjects in reconstruction programs does not necessarily preclude us from calling attention to the problematic

effects of the narrative allusions, politics of knowledge and resulting practices that Limón de la Cerca residents wrestle with in these transcriptions.

So what is life in Limón de la Cerca like, then, if it is not a crisis constituted of a simplistic discursive domination and if the *damnificados* I am so concerned with remain active agents in the midst of this crisis? What room, does such an approach allow for the problematization of the making of incommensurabilities, and what spaces remain for our interpellation on reconstruction trajectories that result in forms of mitigation that are contested by the people they are meant to assist?

The presentation of the following interview transcription is an attempt to answer these questions. The transcription presents the life of a young married couple (Dania Lisette and Reynaldo Alberto) that copes with, and often overcomes, many of the resistances they confront as part of their life in the reconstruction site. As an anthropologist interested in making a contribution to the construction of communities that make sense to disaster survivors and aid institutions alike, I read these transcriptions keeping in mind that the capacity of this household to overcome the challenges of life in Limón de la Cerca does not equate with a claim that there is no contribution that applied anthropologists can or should make to the production of more commensurable forms of community reconstruction. I also read these transcriptions keeping the following list of questions in mind:

- What unnecessary complications of daily life does Dania Lisette's narrative foreground as effects of reconstruction practices?
- Which among these complications may be avoided by simple modifications to reconstruction practices and which are unfortunate but probably unavoidable effects of a catastrophic event and its associated community resettlement?
- What are the deeper implications of these avoidable practices that challenge the capacity of Limón de la Cerca residents to make everyday life readable?

- What are the fundamental assumptions concerning claims by multiple actors in the reconstruction process concerning the existence of a transcendental body politic that these practices illuminate?

Before the hurricane, Dania Lisette and her husband lived in Colonia Victor Manuel Argenial of Choluteca. At the time of our interview they lived in Colonia Nueva Jerusalem, one of the other nine subdivisions of the reconstruction site. Unfortunately, Dania Lisette's immediate family had not benefited from any of the house construction programs, and, although there were several hundred vacant houses in the community, they continued to live in a temporary shelter, or *micro*.

A full sized bed with an iron frame occupied most of the space in the single room home. The small interior was filled by a wooden cabinet, two small chairs for children to sit in, two small tables for cooking and keeping dishes and a few posters and calendars that hung on the walls. Like the *solar* it was located in, the interior of the *micro* was neatly organized. She shared the *micro* with her partner, Reynaldo Alberto and three of her four children. On April 18, 2001 we spoke about her life since the hurricane:

Dania Lisette: well, look, my life, I feel that...that it changes a little for the better, right? Compared to before. Now, well, since I only had my three oldest children, then came my son, the little one, the one that's sleeping. Then...but it has been a suffering, here, being here in these strong temperatures, because we don't even have trees. But we're getting better because, with time, we have already planted a few trees over there, that we are already feeling a little bit of breeze because of that, you see.

But in the economic situation also because, because you find yourself uncomfortable, in going to look for work so far away. Because my husband had to go to work for more than half a day, just for a while. Because he couldn't leave me here alone either, with the children, but now I am getting used to it, and well, we don't live good nor bad, but regular, a tranquil life, yes. Thanks for the food of our children, of the family, right? But there we are, passing by, thanks to God...

RB: you told me that your husband didn't like being gone for more than half a day. Why didn't he like to?

DL: no, it's because look, his work. It's that he was going around in a taxi. He was, he is a taxi driver, he was a taxi driver. Well, he went around in a taxi. The owner of the taxi, to help him, you see, to help him so that he wouldn't lose

work, he let him borrow the taxi for the half day. So he gave it to him from noon until ten at night. Sometimes he missed the last bus, and sometimes he did get it. Sometimes I had to sleep alone with fear, and everything, but I was alone with my kids.

Back then, oh yes, but then, later, he got another taxi, that the lady did let him have it since the morning, since breakfast, until six in the afternoon. Then, like that, we didn't have problems. We, we started getting better because he worked all day with no problem, without thinking about it, and he came to sleep here with us, all night.

That's how he's in the same work, in the same line of work, even if we live day to day, we are making it, with tranquility.

My children already, these two, the elders that I have, the big one is in second grade already, but I don't have him because my mother has him. Because she has him in the school over there [Choluteca], and these two children, I have them. I have them here in the kinder, in the Escuela Lempira, That's where I have them. Look, well, that there I have them, in kinder and pre-kinder so that they can start developing their mind. So they can start...

RB: preparing...

DL: yes, then, yes...yes, it's because you have to make an effort so that the children will move ahead. If you couldn't, then let the children get ahead at least a little...ah, well, yes, and about the, the situation of the illnesses, about how they are, well, they're always with *gripe*, and cough. We always go to the health center, and well, that's where they look at them.

Dania Lisette and Reynaldo Alberto are a resourceful couple who have taken on the challenges of daily life in Limón de la Cerca with perspicacity and optimism. While they did not benefit from any of the housing construction projects, they invested in barbed wire to close off their *solar* and did their best to make a temporary shelter arrangement adequate for long term habitation. Their efforts, however, do not mask the difficulties they confront and the amount of work it takes to make life in Limón readable. As Dania Lisette will explain below, their living accommodations make simple tasks like cooking more complicated than they should be, and the high temperatures of the reconstruction site, the absence of shady trees and the Choluteca River's breeze make it difficult for her and the family to feel at ease, or, as Jose Luis put it, *hallarse*. Still, Dania Lisette and Reynaldo Alberto are not inert. They do things like seeking better

employment, improving living arrangements, and they look for educational alternatives for their children. Dania Lisette continues:

DL: Yes, it's complicated for me because how far away I am from my family, from my mother, from my brothers, from everyone. Because it's only me and a cousin that live here, that are related. And another thing is that when we lived over there, we were, even if in a small house, and of adobe, adobe of earth, of that adobe of the earth, but it was a freshness that was really pleasing. It was bigger, and we had all the commodities more or less, had light and water. Even though little by little we have installed the water, but here we need light, we need it a lot in the house. A roof of tiles or something fresher, because I, I like that, yes. You know that, thinking about it, look at the kitchen I have there, set apart, over there, on the other side, the fire, the little fire. But I have it separate from here, and I have to cook in the sun, because I can't do it in here, yes, then, it's a few unsettling things about the house, about the house well.

RB: yes...

DL: that no, you can't feel even a little well here, you give thanks to God because you are still alive, right, and things didn't come to worst, that's good. Thanks to God also that we're with our children still. The day that the hurricane passed and we're still alive, because even if it's with sacrifice, but there we go, forward.

Dania Lisette speaks of the relational arrangements involved in creating the sentiment of *hallarse*, and living in a reality that she finds readily readable. These involve living in close proximity to her relatives, having her partner spend the night with the family, living in a home that has electricity and running water and that remains cool and comfortable despite the hot Cholutecan summer, and having a kitchen that is not exposed to the elements,

By writing about the sentiment of *hallarse*, I do not claim that this is a primordial emotion or a crude essentialism that originates in shared ties of blood, soil or language (Appadurai 1996) and that manifests spontaneously in all *damnificados*. On the contrary, I am writing about a sentiment that is "largely comprehensible only within specific cultural frames of meaning and style and larger historical frames of power and discipline" (Appadurai 1996:148). Dania Lisette's feeling of *hallarse* is not the expression of a self

evident identity that is reducible in terms of a naturalized culturalism. By naturalized culturalism I refer to any practice or trait that may be easily used to complete the declarative statement “Cholultecans are...” On the contrary, this feeling is the expression of “bodily habits of disciplines of self control and practices of group discipline” (Appadurain 1996:148). These practices of self control and group discipline do not stem from a singular historicity that may be called strictly local, modern, traditional, Honduran or Cholultecan. In contrast, these disciplines are a synthesis of elements that may be spoken of in terms of any of these referents, but, to continue to speak of them in terms of these categorical separations ignores the complex ways in which technologies and discourses travel, get translated, and are internalized. Electricity and adobe walls, monogamy and extended kin networks, child care and tubal ligations, and the driving taxis and life in the reconstruction site are all woven together in an intricate fashion in Dania Lisette’s subjectivity. Furthermore, it is from this complex weaving that she synthesizes agency and takes actions to make life understandable in Limón de la Cerca.

Below, Dania Lisette shows this intricate weaving as she speaks about her decision to undergo a tubal ligation. Her decision to have this medical procedure performed stemmed from her feeling that her children were birthed at intervals that she considered too short in terms of her capacity to provide them with the resources necessary to live what she considers is an adequate life in Cholulteca. Additionally, her decision was equally driven by her partner’s separation from the family during the late months of her pregnancies when he would seek other sexual partners and her desire to maintain a monogamous relationship.

DL: Yes, we’re moving forward, asking God to help us and to guide us to raise our children...that I, I’m only 25 and I had my children one following the other.

Look at my oldest child, he's only six years old, look, and she's four, and the other one three. Yes, he is going to turn five, on the thirtieth of this month. Oh well, look, I was having my children one after another, because the other child is also one year old now, and well, my mother and my brothers saw our situation, of myself with the father of my children. We lived with problems, that we didn't have money. And well, if it wasn't one thing it was another. Then, they gave me some advice, that I get operated [tubal ligation], to get operated, or, if not, I was having more and more children. So then, the situation, it wasn't a stable life. It wasn't a nice life for my children who were going to be born, then...no, I had the operation.

I made the decision also because he, he was very, it's that he was, in those taxis, at work, at work he was a womanizer. I was pregnant, really pregnant, and then he, he would move aside, then we would leave each other.

The reconstruction site, with its limited bus schedules, dangerous night hours, and separation from other relatives adds another level of complication to the way Dania Lisette negotiates her relationships with the people that surround her. Dania Lisette is now separated from her family who usually assisted with child care, and she finds greater difficulties insuring that Reynaldo Alberto will come home at night. In her story, Dania Lisette's family notices the difficulties she finds raising her children and maintaining her conjugal union, and suggests that she take proactive steps to fulfill, if at least partially, her desires. So, while the bodily disciplines that constitute *hallarse*, may not be linked to a singular primordial cultural essence, this sentiment emerges from the same place that she synthesizes her agency and takes actions in order to fashion a reality that is somewhat more legible.

In the disaster literature, the processes by which women experience greater constraints in their capacity to work outside the home and engage in the political contestations of reconstruction – of which we see many instances in the preceding narratives- are attributed to an evolutionary regression (Hoffman 1999) precipitated by crisis situations. In these cases, households in disaster settings are said to regress into an

accentuated gendered private/public dichotomy as part of a survival mode that replicates prior historical arrangements of male hunters and female homemakers (Bonnvillain 1995). The linear metaphors of time that such explanations rely on abound in disaster narratives. During my fieldwork for example, I constantly heard multiple references to Mitch's movement of the country back 30, 40 or 50 years in time in a developmental framework. Still, given the evidence presented in chapter 3, the comments of residents like Concepción and Dania Lisette's cannot be interpreted on the terms of evolutionary narratives or the sequential stages of historicism.

Rather than referring to a historical sequence, I interpret linear metaphors of time and history as a way of speaking about the politics of alterity and representation of the present (Taussig 1987) and about the effects of these politics on the realities experienced by people in disaster situations. The transcriptions featured in this chapter illuminate the relation between the capacity to claim expertise, the politics of knowledge and reconstruction, the distribution of disaster aid, and the relationships between people, words, and things that compose the realities of the daily lives of disaster survivors. It is for this reason that I suggest that the complexities of life in Limón de la Cerca cannot be interpreted through historical analogies that move back and forth on a linear framework, but as products of the mediation of several forms of politics (the politics of reconstruction, of knowledge, of disaster survivors, of representation, of the international assistance world).

In chapter 4 the implications of these politics for the shaping of reality in Limón de la Cerca were traced by inquiring who gets to make decisions about housing design, land parcel distribution, the location of the reconstruction site, and the completion of an

electrification project. Loosely guided by an actor-network model (Latour 1988), these questions excavated further, attempting to discern how assent in program policy and practice was secured, what representations were necessary to secure such assent, what appeals to narratives concerning the body politic of disaster survivors or a transcendental nature had to be made, and what alliances had to be recruited to follow the particular reconstruction trajectory witnessed in Limón de la Cerca.

I find Dania Lisette's narrative informative because it demonstrates that the acknowledgement of the agency of disaster survivors and their participation in the reconstruction of Limón should not be equated for a call to the end of discussions concerning the interruption of trajectories in reconstruction programs that complicate the intelligibility of resettlement communities when more commensurable forms of mitigation are possible. In this case, Marcelino Champagnat, with its 400 m² land parcels, 35 and 40 m² internally divided homes, and absence of *mara* graffiti remains as an example of a viable alternative.

I write this keeping in mind that addressing the contestations pointed out in this dissertation involves more than the building of bigger homes and distribution of bigger land parcels. The practical corollaries of postcolonial and poststructural anthropology emphasized in this dissertation involve the interruption of the processes by which practices that create unnecessary resistances are conceptualized, justified, and reiterated through their appeal to transcendental narratives concerning the body politic of resettlement communities. The idea behind these interruptions being that they will open spaces where different relations between people and things may be conceived and performed. The alteration of housing floor plans in Marcelino Champagnat by CARE

staff at the request of community residents featured in chapter 3 is an example of one such interruption. What other interruptions, I wonder, remain to be made in the ongoing construction of resettlement communities in Central America?

CHAPTER 6

HEALING KNOWLEDGE AND THE POLITICS OF CLINICAL ENCOUNTERS

The reconstruction encounter, as it unfolded in Limón de la Cerca, was a process that created a reality marked by multiple resistances to the daily activities of community residents. These resistances emerged from reconstruction practices that, as demonstrated in chapter 3, were envisioned in relation to specific narratives about universal subjects, the body politic of disaster survivors, and an assumed transcendental reality of economic systems. In the preceding chapter, I used transcriptions from ethnographic interviews with Limón residents to specify the form of these resistances, the disjunctive location of their emergence, and the ways in which Limón residents negotiated relationships with these resistances in their attempts to make life in this locality intelligible.

The treatment of the ways in which community residents negotiate relationships with these resistances in chapter 4 gave rise to a number of issues that we will now examine in closer detail. First among these is the difference between the performative realities of relief agency workers, municipality officials and *damnificados*. By performative realities I refer to the collection of acts through which the reality of objects is demarcated, a process that is marked by a tension between the histories of determining the outlines of bodies and the formulation of systems to make knowledge about them, and the resistances and subversions that these practices confront as they are disseminated (Butler 1993, Good 1994). The narrations of community residents suggest that these performative differences cannot be relegated to a realm of “only language”, and they open

the possibility for the existence of multiple realities whose objects are delineated by variable natures.

Using transcriptions from ethnographic interviews with two Limón residents concerning the healing of children, I intend to show the variable forms that performative realities can take, and to illustrate the role of technologies and practices in their making (Mol 2002). Such an approach emphasizes the role of embodiment, practice and materiality in the making of these realities. The objects on which this discussion will focus are the illness categories of mothers and expert healers in Choluteca and Limón de la Cerca. Illnesses like *ojo*, *caída de estomago* and *moto* will appear in these interview excerpts as maladies that frequently affect children and are treated through specific practices by town healers. Furthermore, they will also appear as illnesses that are not recognized as legitimate objects of treatment by doctors at the town hospital, an epistemic disjuncture that creates a tension between the actors at play in clinical encounters. The tension takes the form of mothers wanting to maintain their capacity to make decisions about how a child is treated, and the objections they raise when health care providers attempt to treat the child for a biomedical pathological category instead.

These narrations will further complicate my treatment of the concept of performative realities because they will show how some of their actors move from one discursive framework to another as they seek health care for family members. This suggests that familiarity with one system of healing does not preclude utilization of other systems with different genealogies. This will be demonstrated by two cases where narrators visit town elders, a hospital, and the community health center in their quest for cures to children's illnesses. What is more, these narrations will show that the

combination of these systems does not constitute an irresolvable contradiction for Limón residents. Instead, these actors appropriate and translate various kinds of healing technologies with the goal of healing family members in an intelligible fashion.

At the same time, the capacity of Limón residents to move between performative frameworks does not diffuse the tension that emerges when one actor attempts to hierarchize knowledge systems by dismissing the reality of illnesses like *ojo* or *caida de estomago*, and treats the child for an illness that is familiar within the biomedical categorical system. Such attempts to dismiss the validity of alternative realities once again brings the politics of knowledge to the forefront of this discussion. What I hope this analysis will show is that Limón residents are not, by default, incapable of creating intelligible realities around reconstruction assistance programs or biomedical health care resources. Instead, unintelligibilities are created when healing technologies and reconstruction assistance are distributed within narratives that close off the possibilities for appropriations and translations to take place. These are narratives that assume that their associated resources have static ontologies, and that the relationship between these resources and human actors must take a specific form in every locality where they are distributed.

I find this discussion relevant because it serves as an analogy where we may consider the relationship between the elements involved in the reconstruction encounter in Limón de la Cerca. In both cases we see the way actors appeal to discourses to claim different forms of expertise. We see that some of these claims appeal to certain notions of objectivity, positivism, and universality that deny the value of other ways of conceiving the world. At the same time, there are other actors that are not concerned with making

such prescriptive claims, and maneuver their way through multiple systems of power-knowledge in their quest for healing or community reconstruction.

In both cases (the reconstruction, clinical visits), we can see how the direct and singular equivalence of actors with discourses, a flattening of the subject and discourse if you will, does not provide us with the analytical sophistication that this ethnography requires. Associations of this kind simply replicate dichotomies between beneficiaries and developers, doctors and patients in a way that is eventually contradicted by this ethnographic record. The narrators of the stories that follow, after all, seek out biomedical resources and assume the category of patients or clients at the town hospital, and community residents align themselves with municipality policies and participate in reconstruction programs whose results they find contestable. Reconstruction experts and biomedical providers are also not simple caricatures of “modernists”, and do not live their lives according to a singular logic. In contrast, my point of interest are the moments in which discursive appeals are made, realities and knowledges are hierarchized, what is at stake in these encounters, the role of agency in the navigation of such moments by Limón residents, and the types of actions it takes to manage these tensions in a way that remains readable.

Fever

Dania Lisette is a resident of Limón that I introduced in Chapter 4 to demonstrate the complexities of life in the reconstruction site and the ways in which *damnificados* attempt to make this locality understandable. As I noted before, Dania Lisette lived in Colonia Nueva Jerusalem with her husband and three of their four children during the period of this ethnography. In the transcriptions that follow she speaks about the recent

illness of her youngest child and of her attempts to heal him using a collection of healing resources ranging from the community health center, healers from the town, and the

Hospital del Sur.

Roberto Barrios (RB): you told me the little one was very ill

Dania Lisette (DL): I had him, I had him with a great fever, and of that fever they told me it was one thing, and then that it was another. Well, I did things for everything...the great fever he had, and you know, he had an eye all swollen, and it got red, red, pure blood the eye. I thought that the child would get a cloud, and that he would not see with that eye. Well no, thank god it didn't.

Look, I took him twice to the health center, and they gave him medicines that didn't reach him. Well, I had to take him to the emergency at the hospital and you know that over there they did see him, they had him in observation, the doctor, and she gave him an injection for the fever. Injection for the infection right, that it was of the eye, well, she gave him, for the eye and everything. Then, you know, well, I gave him the hospital treatment, and he started looking a little better, yes, he started getting better, but I had him really ill, my child.

RB: did they tell you what kind of fever it was?

DL: mmm, you know, they didn't tell me, yes, I want to take him over there one more time. I want to take him again because, so they will tell me about his butt [a reference to an inflammation caused by an injection]. They did a blood exam. He came out with parasites in the blood, that's what I did notice because in the exam, I read the result, then there I saw that he had parasites in the blood and the injections and everything, well already with the medicines he started improving, but the eye was what preoccupied me the most. From there, well, I don't have another way, he will get better now.

Dania Lisette begins to tell me about her attempts to cure her child's latest illness, a recurring fever, by listing the clinics she visited seeking an effective cure. The first clinic she visited was the community health center of Limón de la Cerca, located less than 1 kilometer away from her *micro*, but the prescribed treatment was not effective. Eventually she resorts to visiting the town hospital, *El Hospital del Sur*, which is seven kilometers away in Choluteca.

The hospital is a prominent two level structure built of massive walls and located in the northwestern extremity of the town. A chain link fence and various large, shady fruit trees surround it. It is located on high ground, less than two kilometers from the

Choluteca River. The river breeze and the nearby trees make the hospital a pleasant location. Outside of the fence there are several stalls where vendors sell snacks and flowers and taxi drivers wait for clients. The inside of the hospital is a relaxed setting. The main entrance leads to a tiled-floor hallway that is kept neatly mopped by the maintenance staff. Several smaller hallways are attached to this corridor, leading to different offices and the emergency room, which is located in the southern wing of the structure. The interior of the hospital is quiet, and is lit mostly by daylight that enters through the windows at the ends of corridors. In contrast to this quiet interior, the emergency room features more activity, with patients, their relatives or friends occupying the waiting room.

During the conversation, I ask Dania Lisette if the type of fever was determined at the hospital, with the intention of determining whether the child was diagnosed with malaria. She replies that a blood test was performed and that parasites were found in his blood, but does not specify what the hospital diagnosis was. For Dania Lisette, the condition of her son's eye, and the possibility that it will be permanently damaged, seems is a more pressing concern.

Up to this point, Dania Lisette has only mentioned the use of biomedical health care resources, but, when consulted about her expenditures during the illness, she mentions her use of other types of healers who rely on therapeutic massages (*sobadas*) and spraying (*roseadas*) to cure illnesses like *ojo* (evil eye), which she suspected was the cause of her child's fever because of his inflamed eye.

RB: did you have to spend money to cure him?

DL: oh yes, look, I, that time, my husband was coming home in the afternoon and he always found him with the fever. So we took him to get *roseado* [sprayed], because that is our custom here, right, because they say that it's *ojo* that maybe he

has *empacho*, or something. Well, look, taking him with all kinds of persons like that, twice I took him, nothing. Twice to the health center...I spent some 600 lempiras (20 US dollars). Well, I spent that much, at least, because sometimes at night when I came from the hospital, from over there [Choluteca], I got a taxi because maybe there was no bus, and I came with the child wrapped up in a car, because he was really ill with the...so that's why. But that was the minimum, that was the price so he would get well.

As she responds to my question about expenditures, Dania Lisette begins to complicate the picture of healing in Limón de la Cerca. In her case, healing practices like *sobadas* (therapeutic massages) and *roseadas* (oral spraying with a concoction of flower buds and distilled liquor) are combined with biomedical services. In this particular example, the latter provided the most effective treatment, but this particular outcome is not transformed into a prescriptive statement that denies the efficacy of *sobadas* or *roseadas*. For Dania Lisette, her primary concern is overcoming the agency of the fever that affects her child, and not in establishing the realism of any one healing system. This is a process where Dania Lisette engages various forms of human and nonhuman agency including that of the illness that affects her child, the different types of remedies she purchases or acquires, and the various types of experts she visits to obtain a desired outcome: to make the fever end. Thinking about Dania Lisette's practices, I find it relevant to draw a parallel between her actions and Andrew Pickering's comments concerning the workings of those associated practices and epistemes we call western science:

But there is quite another way of thinking about science. One can start from the idea that the world is filled not, in the first instance, with facts and observations, but with agency. The world is continually doing things, things that bear upon us not as observation statements upon disembodied intellects but as forces upon material beings. (Pickering 1995:6)

The dance of agency seen asymmetrically from the human end, thus takes the form of a dialectic of resistance and accommodation

where resistance denotes the failure to achieve an intended capture of agency in practice, and accommodation an active human strategy of response to resistance. (Pickering 1995:22)

The types of things the world is doing that bear upon Dania Lisette include the inflammation of her son's eye and an elevated temperature that will not end. To cure her child, she engages in a dance of agency, and a dialectic of resistance and accommodation that takes the form of visits to multiple sites of healing, including the community health center, *sobadoras* in Choluteca, and finally the *Hospital del Sur*.

For Dania Lisette, the performative reality of the particular object of treatment, whether it is *ojo* or malaria, is not a major issue as she is specifically interested in reducing her son's fever and eye inflammation. From her narration, it seems that Dania Lisette considers healing technologies with significantly different histories and conceptualizations of reality as capable of acting upon the fever. But her fluid approach towards the specificity of illness may not necessarily be shared by all the actors in the healing process. Byron Good (1994), for example, has demonstrated that medical training involves a process of enculturation by which students are taught to conceptualize the body and illness in a more rigid way. This training involves the teaching of specific ways of delimiting objects of treatment (organs, pathologies) on the premise that there is a singular possible reality to human bodies that the medical gaze is best suited to detect. This conceptualization of the body, in turn, limits the possibility for the recognition of alternative realities.

In Dania Lisette's case, the tension between the envisioning of singular or multiple realities does not pose a major challenge. The illness is cured through her relentless actions. Furthermore, the efficacy of any one healing technology is interpreted

as a successful means of accommodating multiple forms of agency towards a desired intention, to use Pickering's language, and not necessarily a technique that bears a privileged relationship to a singular reality of bodies. In contrast, the next section features a collection of transcriptions where a family member's illness must be treated in a context where the ontological difference of performative realities and the politics of knowledge do become relevant. In the case that follows we will see that not all healing processes in Limón de la Cerca are navigated without the surfacing of contestations surrounding the politics of knowledge. It is in these cases that the potential for the creation of incommensurabilities like the ones that gave form to the reconstruction crisis in Limón de la Cerca is most accentuated. In this case, I will be interested in determining what is at stake in the making of these disjunctures, and how people who cannot be easily circumscribed within an essentialized category form constituencies, despite their differences, to resist practices that infringe their agency.

Before moving on to consider these questions, however, I find it necessary to consider one more piece of evidence provided by Dania Lisette concerning the practice of *sobar* and *rosear* in Choluteca. Continuing our conversation, I ask her to describe these two processes. Her description indicates that these two activities are important elements in the embodiment of experience (Appadurai 1996, Chakrabarty 2000), or, rather, they are part of the work that it takes to make the specific reality of illnesses like *ojo*.

RB: where was he *roseado*, here in Limón de la Cerca?

DL: no, in Limón de la Cerca no, eh, he was *roseado* in another place, eh, do you want to know the place?

RB: yes, yes.

DL: He was *roseado* over here by the municipal bus terminal, and he was also *roseado* in another place, [*barrio*]Libertad. There, in *barrio* Libertad.

RB: in a private home or where?

DL: yes, eh, no, in a home, in a home, yes. You give, they are women, older women that, that say they, that they know about that. They're not *curanderas* or anything. They are women, of age, women of the house, yes.

RB: and when they do *roseadas*, what do they do?

DL: they *rosean* with, they buy *guaro*, they say that they chew [leaves] from seven trees, but from the buds, not the flowers. The greenest flowers. Then they go, they grind them, they chew them, and they put a little *guaro* in their mouth and *fuus!*, they spray the child on his back, when he's distracted, they spray the back, all the back, all, even his feet, his head, and then they wrap him in a blanket that you bring, and like that, you have to bring him so that he can sweat the fever they say. If not, the fever won't come out they say, because, me, well, because, to cure the children, one does everything.

RB: yes, you have to try everything.

DL: then, I had it done to him twice, because when I saw him, first I went twice to the health center. When I saw that she didn't, she didn't reach him, well, not even the medicines or anything, then I went to that, so that they would spray him. Yes, then it was better to go to the hospital because none of these things were reaching him, I had to go to the emergency at the Hospital.

At the emergency they did see him, they saw him well, the child, so that, yes, he was improving the next day, the fevers didn't enter him one after another, he was already with less temperature, yes, but I saw him really ill, the child.

By describing how *roseadas* and *sobadas* are conducted in Choluteca, Dania

Lisette shows that *ojo*, as an illness category, cannot be simply relegated to the realm of health belief. *Ojo*, in turn is part of a system of treatment that involves actions on a type of body that does not necessarily correlate with that of the local health center or the town hospital. The illness is treated by spraying the child's body with alcohol and leaves, and massaging the surface of the skin. It is in such acts of "doing" that *ojo* and its treatment become a type of embodied experience and bodily discipline that gives the houses of Cholutecan healers the qualities of this locality and that a specific type of reality is manifested. In the act of *rosear* and *sobar*, Cholutecan healers not only treat a particular type of body, but also participate in the performative reiteration of that particular type of body. This body, through its embodied experience and healing disciplines, then becomes particularly intelligible to Dania Lisette.

Considering the observations of various medical anthropologists considering the contingency of the reality of biomedical pathologies on the realm of practice (Good 1994, Mol 2002, Young 1995), *ojo*, and the type of body it implies, does not seem to be without company. I write this not referring to the ontological specificity of *ojo*, but to the process by which it becomes real and the role that diagnostic and healing practices play on the making of its reality.

Annmarie Mol (2002) and Allan Young (1995) have noted the need for medical anthropologists to investigate the types of technology and work that it takes to make pathologies like atherosclerosis and post traumatic stress disorder manifest themselves. By paying close attention to the history of the technologies involved in the diagnosis of these pathologies, Mol and Young demonstrate that atherosclerosis and post traumatic stress disorder are not readily evident entities, but become so only through the completion of specific types of acts (looking through microscopes, completing a questionnaire, extracting blood). Furthermore, these specific types of acts become possible and intelligible only within a particular grid of histories and discourses about the body, the self and their related technologies.

These histories and discourses about the body are also not devoid of contestations, as the development of scientific texts, diagnostic technologies, and treatments is often marked by heated debates by experts that argue for different ways of envisioning the body, pathology, and disease etiology (Young 1995). Young shows that the establishment of diagnostic procedures through which the reality of pathology is established is more the product of a politics of knowledge than the superior potency of any one technology or narrative about the body.

I bring this debate up as a means of noting that *ojo*, like the body as it is learned and experienced by Good's medical students, is not necessarily readily evident, but requires certain types of learning and phenomenology for it to become understood and for its reality to be acknowledged. Viewing *ojo* from this perspective, *rosear* and *sobar* take a position in Cholutecan healing alongside biomedical technologies as means of overcoming the resistance of illnesses. Following this logic, the efficacy of *sobar* and *rosear* is based on the fact that they are actions upon a type of body that can, on occasion, help overcome a certain type of resistance (a fever that won't cease). At the same time, like the treatments of the community health center, they may prove ineffective, in which case, Dania Lisette seeks another alternative, the *Hospital del Sur*.

Ojo and Moto

Yaneth Carranza, an expert healer, narrated the following series of transcriptions. Prior to the hurricane, Yaneth and her family lived in Iztoca, a semi-rural settlement across the Choluteca River. At the time of our interview, she lived with her husband, a brother, her daughter and her grandchild in Colonia Samaritana of Limón de la Cerca. At the time of the interview she was 45 years old and sold tortillas at the Cholutecan market. Her *solar* was one of the most pleasant spots in all of Limón de la Cerca. Several fruit trees had grown rapidly in the year and a half she had lived in her new house. On a cloudy May afternoon we sat on a bench in her *solar* to speak about illnesses that commonly affect children. The transcription begins as she brings up the theme that there are some illnesses that are not considered real by health staff at *Hospital del Sur*, but which she considers to be real threats to the health of young children.

Roberto Barrios (RB): and what about illnesses like *ojo* or *empacho*, do they [her children] get any of those?

Yaneth Carranza (YC): ah, yes, they're always *ojeados*, but many people don't believe in *oyo*. But it's real. *Oyo*, you know, they get *oyo* all the time, but we make them remedies here. Because the fever of *oyo* is hot. The head, and the back with great fever. Then their head hurts them the most, when they have the *oyo* fever. But we give them... remedies made here at home. The remedy we give them is ruda, mustard. Because since the beginning I have a ruda planted there. Ruda, mustard, we put in, and some sips of *guaro* (liquor), because it's strong. The spraying must be strong, and seven buds of any tree. And so we spray him, and we wrap him well, with a *mejoralita* [children's aspirin] so, so he heals. Well wrapped, so when he awakes, really happy, and, that's how we cure that.

Yaneth's narration shows that the healing practices she engages in cannot be easily categorized as either traditional or modern, biomedical or non-biomedical. In this case, a technology that may be considered a modern medical product, children's aspirin, becomes part of a system of healing that operates on objects that, in Yaneth's story, are not recognized in the epistemes of other people; "other people" being a reference to health care professionals at the the *Hospital del Sur*. The healing practices that Yaneth speaks about, then, could be said to be a synthesis and translation of technologies and treatments that are used to overcome a non-human agency of maladies like *oyo*.

Yaneth's narration also suggests that *oyo* bears certain semiotic properties that make it a performative object. As such, it exists in some realities but not others. *Oyo* also does not just exist as an object without content, it exists with specific relationships towards the humans it affects. It is a children's illness, it is treated specifically through roseadas and sobadas, and, as other residents told me, it is caused by strong, hot gazes.

Finally, *oyo* is not just simply an ideology, it is part of a system of actions (observing signs, massaging, spraying), bodies, and the production of material technologies (spraying concoctions, warm towels) that make it part of an embodied experience. As in the case of Young's psychologists and Mol's disease pathologists, the

replication of these activities is an indispensable part of the work necessary to make the reality of *oyo*, and, by extension, of Limón de la Cerca.

Prompted by my further questions concerning what other illnesses are not recognized as real, Yaneth continues:

YC: That they don't believe? In *oyo*, they don't believe in *empacho*. Like that! A child will die of *oyo* or *empacho*, or fallen fontanelle, that they don't believe. The fontanelle of a young child is weak, until it closes, then the child is out of danger from the fontanelle. They don't believe. If a child dies with a fallen fontanelle...it's very different the fallen fontanelle, the child only. It can't grab the breast when it has fallen fontanelle. You notice it because its mouth hurts, and because as much as it wants to hold on to the breast, it can't. When it has fallen fontanelle it's well known, it can't grab the breast, the child only breastfeeds, and it suffers because it can't grab the breast.

RB: And is there any other thing that doctors don't pay attention to?

YC: no, there is another illness that the doctors...there are children that have died of. Their intestines get mixed up with that other diarrhea and nausea that children get, like *moto*.

RB: *moto*.

YC: an illness they call *moto*. Here, look, they have discovered it by the fever, and it's not the same as umbilical fever, this *moto* they get it from the navel, they say their navel hurts them.

RB: When they are just born, or around what age?

YC: Until they are big, until the first year they get it because a friend, her one year old was going to die of *moto*. Well, they get it, big, up to the first year, and the symptom of *moto* is a green diarrhea. They seem like caterpillars, as if they only ate leaves, and the nausea, and nausea, and you, you take them to a doctor, and you take them to another, and you don't know where to go.

Many children have died, and with all the medicines and there is no remedy. When a great pain in the stomach attacks them, they are about to roll their eyes, the child dies of *moto* and they don't believe in that, and if you as a mother are not careful, you're just having children to loose them. They are illnesses the doctors don't believe in.

RB: and what causes *moto*? Is there any cause?

YC: yes, nausea and diarrhea, and when they die, when the child is already dead I have heard they say 'oh mother, of *moto* he died on me!' It seems as if they were beaten, they are really bruised once they're dead. Like that, with bruises, really purple the child, and once dead, it's difficult for the fever to come down, when the child dies, it turns purple.

Speaking about *moto* and other allegedly unrecognized illnesses, Yaneth revisits

Byron Good's (1994) observation that healing systems treat objects that are specific to

their epistemic histories. As such, *moto* is recognized through signs that fit a particular logic about the composition of the body, and the relations between this body and other objects in the world. Pain in the navel, a green diarrhea, and bruising of the skin after death are readily readable to Yaneth as signs of *moto*, but not to me. For these symptoms to become so, I must share a history of conceptualizing the body in terms of different categorical divisions and its relation to pathological agents other than those I have learned to recognize through my own clinical encounters, enculturation, exposure to popular media, and formal biological education. The cumulative effect of these differences, some of which are embodied in a manner that makes it difficult to imagine the plausibility of an alternative, is what I have repeatedly referred to as a performative reality.

In the next excerpt, Yaneth elaborates this point, describing the treatment of *moto*, a practice that she finds intelligible and effective within her system of conceptualizing the body, illness and its causes. The cure involves administering a purgative drink, which cleanses the ill child's body of "bad things", the cause the sickness. Like the *sobadas* and *roseadas* used for *ojo*, the purgative is more than part of a belief system, it is an agent that does things to bodies and which, according to these narratives, helps overcome the nonhuman agency of *moto*.

RB: and, is there anything the mothers give them when they have *moto*?

YC: yes, I cured mine because there is one, one medicine that is effective. The head....I had some squash plants, but because I couldn't get the seeds for squash, I lost it. The bud of the squash, with, with garlic, mustard and *chichimora*, a, a flat seed called *chichimora* that they sell at the market, it's really bitter. You make an *horchata* [rice-based drink] with some grains of salt and you give it, well strained. You give it to the child, and until it purges the child, it takes all the bad things it has in the stomach.

When they go to sleep, a little drunk because it's really strong, you wrap them well, and they awake tranquil.

Crossing Epistemic Boundaries

Yaneth and Dania Lisette's healing stories fall neatly within Andrew Pickering's model of the dance of human and nonhuman agency. This is a process in which human actors attempt to obtain a desired outcome (healing a child) by completing an action (visiting the hospital, administering an injection, visiting a healer's house, administering a *sobada*), observing the way it engages nonhuman agency (does it stop the fever? Does it stop the green diarrhea?), and making the necessary accommodations (visiting another clinic or healer) if the desired outcome is not achieved.

The mangle of practice, as it is presented above, seems to be free of performative constraints. Objects of treatment (*ojo*, fever, *moto*) are engaged by these two narrators using technologies with very different histories, and designed on the basis of different conceptualizations of the body and illness. A fever suspected of being *ojo*, for example, is treated with *sobadas*, visits to the community health center, and the town hospital by Dania Lisette. Also, in the transcription below, Yaneth visits the *Hospital del Sur*, seeking medical treatment for yet another unrecognized illness, *caida de estomago* (fallen stomach).

In both cases, Yaneth and Dania Lisette do not exclude the possibility that a healing technology or practice, whether provided by a town healer, the health staff at the community clinic, or the doctors at the town hospital, will help overcome the nonhuman agency of a child's illness. At the same time, illnesses like malaria, *ojo*, and *moto* are conceived in terms of bodily properties that are not shared by all of these actors. Within the Yaneth and Dania Lisette's mangles of practice, such a disjuncture does not imply the presence of an irresolvable unintelligibility. Healing techniques are appropriated across

performative lines, and the ontologic specificity in relation to the objects they were designed to cure is accommodated to their own intentions. In their healing practices, these two narrators show a capacity to translate diverse technologies into outcomes that they find readable and satisfactory.

So what does such a process tell us about the making of incommensurabilities in disaster reconstruction? If Limón residents have such open conceptions of body and illness, and, by extension, community, and if they are capable of appropriating technologies and practices into intelligible systems of action, by what mechanisms were reconstruction incommensurabilities produced? In the section that follows, Yaneth provides a template of the process by which clinical encounters can result in disjunctures that unnecessarily limit the ability of Limón residents to read the realities that manifest before them. This is a process in which their capacity to maneuver across performative frameworks and to translate technologies and practices in a way that allows them to make accommodations to other forms of agency is severely curtailed. Once again, at the heart of this process are allusions to transcendental narratives about the universal ontology of objects, bodies, and subjects, and the hierarchization of knowledge systems.

YC: ... children suffer from fallen stomach. From some fall, the children, yes, because of the neglect of the younger ones. They drop the child, the child falls, they get fallen stomach also. It is an uncontrollable nausea, the fallen stomach, very quickly the child dies. The water doesn't stop, not even the mother's milk stops it, nothing, nothing. The child's stomach is completely strained with the fallen stomach. Many times there are good women that, they put the child like that, with the hands stretched out, and if the child has a sunken stomach, it has fallen stomach, but if it is level with the chest nothing's wrong. Then, the mothers put the child like this, really sunken the stomach is, fallen stomach, then they come and with a bunch of, with some rags that are wetted with egg whites, that's something I could never learn. They suck the stomach. The old ladies hold on tight, sucking the stomach so it will lift. And so they wrap the child. For eight days it goes wrapped up, while the stomach gets better, and, and they take the mother's breast off, since it must only drink

cinnamon tea, sweet orange blossoms, or short pepper tea of one that's, that's odorous. Only that is given to the child for eight days. That's how they have cured mine.

RB: But do they get that when they are younger or when they are older, the fallen stomach.

YC: no, when they are little, little, until a few months, once they're big, no. Yes, you know, my sister lost a one year old girl, fallen stomach, you know, she fell from the crib. She didn't secure the crib well, the child falls, and a big hammering fall to the ground. But that was regretted, that child ended up bruised and unresponsive, but nobody saw her fall. All of us in the family were asleep, we didn't notice it was fallen stomach, she was in the hospital. We took her out because she had no remedy, the girl.

After four days that we took her out of the hospital, the girl died, a great diarrhea and uncontrollable nausea, until...she was a big piece of girl, and like that she died, in pure bones, fallen stomach. And for the same thing, so much happened to me with another one just like hers she was, they were of the same litter. Such a big girl she is now, she has a girl now. She got it because of neglect, if you get busy, the children help you, the bigger ones help you with the little ones, you don't notice they dropped her. She turns up one day with fallen stomach.

[Yaneth continues by describing her visit to *Hospital del Sur*, where she goes seeking assistance for curing her daughter from the *caída de estomago*] A lady tells me, 'what are you doing here'?[at the town hospital] 'with my girl who is grave,' I tell her. But my girl ended up stiff, and I screamed in the hospital, you know, my girl was grave and I screamed in the hospital, with my daughter grave. And they surrounded me, a bunch of women there, and a woman tells me, "what's wrong with you" 'My daughter is ill', but I was a mourning, and another woman tells me:

'Look, the doctor will tell you that you have to hospitalize her. Don't hospitalize her. It's better if you...' she tells me '...if she gives you the medicines, the doctor, you go into the consultation, but take care of her, don't give her to him'. She tells me 'Go to doña Petrona's'. That woman, and by the way, she's already dead, 'She's great with the children'. I only sought out that woman, you know, and for me it was hard when that woman died.

As Yaneth speaks about Doña Petrona and her anguish over her daughter's illness she becomes agitated. Her voice quivers, her hands tremble and tears begin to well in her eyes. Listening to the taped interview I am reminded that, despite this calculated analysis I have tried to follow in this chapter, the healing of children and the experiences that it involves is an emotionally charged activity for Yaneth. Furthermore, the importance of this activity cannot be dismissed as a trivial sentimental attachment to a collection of

alterable bodily disciplines. And, while these bodily disciplines and their associated sentimentality cannot be attributed to some essentialized primordialism, they are a critically important element in Yaneth's capacity to make an intelligible reality. Yaneth continues:

And I go to doña Petrona's, she was an old woman then, I had to hold her hand, and she told me: 'I don't do these jobs anymore' she tells me, the old woman. 'I am tired now, but I will do this favor for you because of the girl'. And she examined her, 'oh yes', she tells me 'the girl has fallen stomach', she tells me. 'I will make the medicine, but you must hold my hand, and take me to where the girl is'.

The woman was old, but even blind she made me the remedy. And there she is, the girl, such a big girl. I was going to lose her, of fallen stomach. And so my sister told me, she regretted, she regretted. She told me 'look', she tells me, 'how I lost my girl of fallen stomach, and how you cured yours'. But it's because I was *majista* [cool, in charge of the situation], I tell her, that's what you were missing, yes, and luck, and God, that I, at all times, when my children are sick, I mourn over God, asking for my children, you know. Because of that woman, could it be that none of mine, I had six children, there they are, not one's death have I mourned, because I have always been ready, see. Only on doctors I don't rely. Me, if only with doctors I stayed, u! My children would have died! Some of *empacho*, others of fallen stomach, others of fallen fontanelle, u! Of moto, of moto they were also going to die, but I don't rely only on doctors.

In this final transcription, Yaneth further complicates my presentation of healing practices in Limón de la Cerca by suggesting that the hospitalization of a child suffering from *caída de estomago* can have severe deleterious health effects if doctors at *Hospital del Sur* do not treat the child for this specific illness. According to her narrative, she is warned by other women at the hospital that this is precisely what will happen if she relinquishes the child to the strict care of hospital staff. In Yaneth's story, *Caida de estomago* does not exist in the epistemes of doctors at the hospital. These actors, in turn, diagnose different pathological objects, and approach their treatment of illness through different practices and technologies than the ones Doña Petrona uses.

In prior transcriptions, Yaneth and Dania Lisette demonstrated a capacity to incorporate diverse technologies and practices in their attempts to overcome the illnesses that affected their children. In these transcriptions, their actions seemed to take place in a location devoid of knowledge hierarchizations like those that abounded in the reconstruction encounter. In Dania Lisette's story, she visits the nurses and doctor at the community health center, healers near the town market and the town hospital. Throughout her search for a cure to her child's fever she tries applying different healing technologies, and the histories of these technologies, or any one specific claim to efficacy or exclusive access to a transcendental materiality do not become a location of tension. In cases such as these, the body of the ill child as a performative object maintains a flexibility that permits people like Dania Lisette to imaginatively combine multiple resources to achieve their desired results.

In contrast, Yaneth's final story shows the possibility that this flexibility may be constrained, and substituted with a perilous type of fixity if one particular way of envisioning and materializing the body is granted precedence over others. I use the term *perilous* because such an act inhibits Yaneth's capacity to operate in the mangle of Cholultecan healing, and such a limitation carries the potential threat of creating an unintelligibility that she feels could result in the child's death.

I find the stories Yaneth and Dania Lisette tell interesting because neither case concludes with the creation of an irresolvable unintelligibility. In both stories we see Yaneth and Dania Lisette's successful navigation of a healing process where they combine technologies with different histories and move between performative frameworks with great efficacy. At the same time, Yaneth's story reminds us that the

possibility that one actor, or one group of actors, may try to limit her capacity to synthesize technologies and practices into a meaningful and efficacious outcome by alluding to a specific narrative concerning the transcendence of one type of body or nature. Such an allusion would take the form of hospital staff dismissing the validity of *caída de estomago* as a legitimate object of treatment, diagnosing an illness that is recognized within their episteme, and treating the child accordingly.

In Yaneth's story, she chooses not to hospitalize her child and seeks the help of Doña Petrona, who provides the curing remedy. The hospital staff at *Hospital del Sur* also do not appear as malevolent modernizers in white overcoats. They offer assistance accessing a type of healing technology, and allow Yaneth to leave the hospital to search for another type of treatment.

In the introduction to this chapter I claimed that there are important parallels between clinical and reconstruction encounters that may help us think critically about the processes that precipitated a crisis in the reconstruction of Limón de la Cerca. In addition, clinical encounters and the mangle within which children are healed in Limón de la Cerca may help us think about similar processes in this same locality that do not result in such problematic disjunctures. In both cases there are similar actors at play. These include experts, clients, multiple performative frameworks, desires, imagined outcomes, technologies and practices.

In both cases (reconstruction, healing), Limón residents set out to obtain desired resources from institutions and their workers, and institutional players set out to distribute these technologies and services within specified organizational frameworks. In the case of healing, bodies and realities maintain a flexibility that allows Yaneth and Dania Lisette

to synthesize and translate technologies and practices with diverse genealogies in ways that allow them to overcome the nonhuman agency of fever, *ojo*, *moto*, and *caida de estomago*. Simultaneously, Dania Lisette reminds us that despite the flexibility that allows her to operate successfully in the mangle of Cholutecan healing, there are performative differences in the way illnesses like *caida de estomago* are materialized and treated by town healers and the way hospital or clinic staff approaches the child's body and its pathologies. Furthermore, she considers these differences to be a potential locus of tension where knowledge and realities may be hierarchized- if the doctor were to hospitalize the child against her wishes and treat it for an illness other than *caida de estomago*- , an action that would inhibit her capacity to cure her child in an effective and intelligible way. Of course, this does not happen in her narrative, and, despite her apprehensions, she is capable of taking the child to Doña Petrona.

Yaneth's concern resonates with my review of the reconstruction encounter in Limón de la Cerca, where the flexibility and openness granted to the child's body was not allowed in the body politic of the reconstruction site. In chapters 3 and 4 I presented ethnographic and narrative evidence that a number of key decisions concerning the distribution and dimensions of land parcels, the design and evaluation of housing programs, and the completion of the electrification project were made on the basis of allusions to narratives concerning the transcendence of alienated, minimal investing, maximizing subjects, the primacy of economic law, and the disaster survivor as a collection of tropes that is intelligible within the broader aesthetic of international assistance world. These allusions took place in a context of political contestations between a faction of *damnificado* leaders and the local government, and were further

complicated by the politics of knowledge and representation that structured the activities of assistance organizations in this locality.

In contrast, In Marcelino Champagnat a process of mangling similar to that described by Yaneth and Dania Lisette in their stories of healing did take place. CARE staff and community residents encountered one another at the intersection of their agencies, with CARE staff desiring to construct housing structures following one set of dimensions and spatial distribution, while Marcelino residents desired another. In this case, CARE staff and *damnificados* constituted mirroring forms of resistance, a dialectical situation that was resolved through mutual forms of accommodation, demonstrating that a call for a more flexible and nuanced approach to community reconstruction is not unreasonable. The transformation of such a call for greater flexibility in the imagining of community reconstruction and for a type of epistemic openness that will allow for the mangling of reconstruction programs into mutually intelligible forms of reconstruction into effective systems practice will require the formulation and implementation of reconstruction procedures and politics of knowledge that were not in place among aid agencies and the local government during the first two years of reconstruction in Limón de la Cerca.

CHAPTER 7

CHILDREN, HOUSEHOLDS, AND INSTITUTIONAL NARRATIVES OF THE BODY

The bodies of children and the stories people and institutions tell through them have played a central role in the conceptualization of this ethnography. This study of disaster reconstruction began as an anthropometric inquiry into the health status of hurricane-displaced populations in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch. For this reason, I begin this section by calling attention to a numerical summary of the growth measures of children under five years of age in Limón de la Cerca in July of 1999 (table 7-1). Table 7-1 is a narrative of sorts, similar to the narratives of *damnificados* that we explored in chapter 4, but different in the ontological properties it claims for the objects it measures. It is an institutional narrative in the sense that it tells a story about the bodies of children under five years of age in three hurricane-affected regions of Honduras. It tells us that children living in large temporary shelters in 1999 were faring much worst, physiologically, than children that were not. The table tells its narrative as a modest witness, it claims objectivity and epistemic superiority while it edits the politics, power relations, performative significations, and epistemic assumptions that lay at the heart of the perceived differences. Embedded in its neat percentages and compartmentalized pathologies (stunting, wasting and underweight) are also very particular stories that nutritional science has told about the bodies of children during the last two hundred years. These are the stories of potentiality (what bodies could be), normativity (what they should be) and developmentalism (those that are optimal) (Castañeda 2003).

Table 7-1. Percentage of severe and moderate malnutrition among Honduran children under 5 years of age, 1999 University of Florida study versus earlier surveys.

	Severe	Stunting (%)		Severe	Wasting (%)		Underweight (%)	
		Moderate	Total		Moderate	Total	Moderate	Total
Results of 1999 University of Florida study								
Limón de la Cerca	10.4	27.1	37.5	2.1	10.4	12.5	28.2	41.7
Catacamas	4.0	15.2	19.2	3.0	3.0	6.0	14.1	20.2
Tegucigalpa	9.0	34.0	43.0	1.0	8.0	9.0	23.0	31.0
Chi-square test			P=0.001			P=0.296		P=0.005
Results of 1996 National Micronutrient Survey*								
Other urban areas	13.1	22.4	35.5	NA	1.2	1.2	18.0	22.1
San Pedro Sula and medium-sized cities	3.4	14.5	17.9	NA	1.3	1.3	8.5	9.4
Tegucigalpa	3.9	21.0	24.9	NA	0.7	0.7	8.2	10.0
Results of 1994 Survey on Socioeconomic Indicators**								
Tegucigalpa	11.1	24.2	35.3	0.0	1.6	1.6	11.1	11.6
National statistics by expenditure category								
Lowest 20%	28.1	25.9	54.0	0.0	2.6	2.6	23.2	29.4
Lowest 5%	34.8	25.5	60.3	0.0	3.0	3.0	23.3	32.9
Results of 1991/1992 National Epidemiology and Family Health Survey***								
Tegucigalpa	NA	NA	26.2	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

* (Secretaría de Salud 1997)

** (Secretaría de Planificación 1996)

*** (Secretaría de Planificación 1995)

The following analysis of nutritional epidemiology is analogous to Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) examination of the deployment of modern European categories of citizenship in South Asia. Concerned with the historicism implied in the category of *peasant*, he is particularly interested in the differences and similarities that this subject has in modern day India, where the experiential points of reference through which people's subjectivities emerge (religion, kinship, historically-specific economic relations) challenge the western definition of peasantry. Throughout *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty weaves in and out of analytic (Marxist, positivist, universalist) and hermeneutic (Heideggerian, relativist, particularist) tendencies in social science in an attempt to establish a dialogue between western and non-western knowledge systems. He writes:

European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations... The point is not to reject social science categories but to release into the space occupied by particular European histories sedimented in them other normative and theoretical thought enshrined in other existing life practices and their archives. (Chakrabarty 2000:16, 20)

Perhaps a more relevant quote from Chakrabarty is one taken from his discussion of the ontological implications suggested by the different ways in which the sentiment of compassion was experienced and explained among Enlightenment European and Bengali intellectuals during the colonial era. Dealing specifically with the issue of violence against widows in Bengal- particularly concerning the practice of self-immolation during a deceased husband's funeral- and whether it was only the western modern subject that could, through reason, recognize suffering, he writes:

Following Adam Smith and David Hume, there were at least two answers given to the question: For whom did sight generate sympathy or compassion? The answer could be the Enlightenment subject, or the subject who, as a rare gift

possessed the quality called *hriday*. The fact that we come across these two different answers in the same body of texts suggest that they did not displace each other but existed in a relationship of mutual supplementation to constitute an intertwined strand in Bengali modernity. (Chakrabarty 2000:129)

On the one hand, then, there is the self-aware Enlightenment subject, who, equipped with the capacity for reason and reflexivity, is allegedly capable of thinking beyond gods, politics, history, myth and tradition. This subject operates in an objective world where prediscursive materiality takes precedence over the neatly compartmentalized (and supposedly exorcized) world of ideology. Most importantly, the separation of the world into these domains of the material and the ideological is in itself a performative move that allows for the representation of the Bengali as pre-modern and irrational. From this perspective, the suffering of the widow who commits *sati* (self-immolation) at her deceased husband's funeral should be recognizable to all human beings on the basis of a shared capacity for reason, regardless of custom or religious belief. Those populations that are incapable of recognizing suffering through reason are designated as pre-modern, subject to the tyranny of tradition, delayed in a historical stage that antecedes that of the European miracle, and in need of colonial mentorship. . Ironically, then, it is the same rational ability to recognize suffering that serves as a justification for the brutal practice of colonization.

On the other hand, there is the Bengali hybrid, who, in the process of engaging the hegemonic expansion of the enlightenment, embarks in an introspective quest, conducting an archaeology of suffering and compassion throughout Bengali pre-coloniality. In this case, the Bengali subject- embodied in 19th century novelists and philosophers- arrives at *hriday* as a response to European reason. *Hriday*, in Bengali philosophy, is a divinely granted capacity to perceive suffering that distinguishes that

person from the majority of the world's population. Consequently, the sentiments of suffering and compassion did appear to exist in pre-colonial Bengal -a temporal space reconstructed through the study of literary texts- but the fundamental ways in which this capacity was conceived, its genealogy and hermeneutics if you will, were radically different from that of the Enlightened subject. In one case, reason is a universal capacity that grants access to an ultimate world of truths and objects, and, in the other, *hriday* is a treasured divine quality that is, unfortunately, not shared by all humanity. This comparison is further complicated by the colonial paradox where reason, with its claimed capacity to alleviate suffering, is used as a principal justification for the perpetuation of a system of power relations that, despite its humanitarian intentions, exponentially produces difference and marginalization at a global scale.

I make these remarks not with the intention of defaming modernity (and, by extension, nutritional science), or of simply reversing the fetishized charges of good and evil that this system has relied on for so long to insure its perpetuation. I feel that the need to be pugilistic with respect to the liberal academy, humanitarian discourse and reason is a necessity required to overcome the way in which this specific system of order has been ingrained into our very own ontology, our sense of being, not just in the case of our individuality, but of what we consider to be universal and uncontestable truths, prescriptions, social and natural realities. What is important here is to recognize how the understanding of the profound differences between *hriday* and reason, nutritional epidemiology and stories about a reconstruction community in a context that is removed from cultural narratives of salvation, historicism, development, positivism and reason can help us understand the epistemic, performative and ontological issues that are at stake in

the reconstruction encounter. The case of Limón de la Cerca has shown us how, although unfamiliar knowledge/practice systems may seem irrational and ineffective to the uninitiated, their importance in the way *damnificados* materialize their realities, live their lives and establish relations with assistance agencies and each other is undeniable. To ignore the knowledge/practices of the *damnificados* precipitates a crisis like that seen in Limón de la Cerca. I use the term crisis, in this case, in light of Achille Mbembe's (2001) comments concerning the postcolonial condition:

In addition to its political determinations and its [crisis] visible and material manifestations, which are plain to see [i.e. collapsing houses, streetgang graffiti], this crisis must be understood as the persistence of a central excess, of a form of opaque violence and degree of terror that flow from a particular failure: that of the postcolonial subject to exercise freely such possibilities as he or she has, to give him/herself and the environment in which he/she lives a form of reason that would make everyday existence readable, if not give it actual meaning. (Mbembe 2001:143)

An additional point I would like to make is that none of the stated epistemes (modernity, Bengali philosophy, *damnificado* narratives) has overcome suffering, neither is more efficacious if judged by the other's criteria, and that hierarchizing these knowledge/practice systems perpetuates a structure of impositions and translations that will not help the reconstruction of Choluteca.

This chapter mirrors Chakrabarty's analysis in that nutrition statistics occupy a position similar to that of the Enlightenment subject who claims that *his* rationality is the ultimate means of detecting and ameliorating a condition of suffering, inequality or subjugation. Substituting for *hirday* are the multiple individual and collective narratives of *damnificados*, assistance agency workers managers and local government officials that we have explored in previous chapters. What is important in this case is how, through the understanding of the semiotics – that is, the discursive links between meanings,

categories and signs – and hermeneutics (the ways in which these links emerge) that structure these multiple systems of order and that make these forms of knowledge possible, we begin to grasp the ontological differences – the different ways in which bodies and subjects are thought about, synthesized as real, and acted upon – that exist between the multiple actors in the reconstruction encounter. In this process we also begin to grasp how these differences influence the ways in which these actors create realities and engage the process of community reconstruction. The practices the actors engage in, in turn, affect the processes by which these encounters create communities or crises.

What is interesting about *hridaya*, reason, suffering, nutritional epidemiology, and reconstruction narratives is that all of these concepts, ontologies, and epistemic resources are deeply concerned with reality, but not in a singular sense. For this reason, none can be neatly severed into (or accused of being confined to) a realm of detached ideology or language, where reality is arbitrarily constructed irrespective of contextual elements like funeral pyres, collapsing houses, emaciated bodies and colonial occupation. This statement, of course is modified with the stipulation that the relevance of a materiality in one system does not necessarily imply its relevance in the other as this relevance is formulated within the semiotic/hermeneutic networks and performative practices that structure each episteme.

Simultaneously, this is not a nihilistic denial of the plight confronted by *damnificados* in Cholulteca. The particular contribution that I hope to make is to illustrate the relevance of post-colonial and post-structural theory to the anthropology of disaster reconstruction. A crisis was ensuing throughout this study of Limón de la Cerca precisely because Cholultecs were no longer capable or were inhibited in their ability to

“make everyday existence readable” and to “give it actual meaning.” For this reason, the approach I am about to take to nutritional epidemiology should not be interpreted as the proverbial throwing out of the baby (science, humanism, positivist methodologies) with the bathwater (neo-colonialism, epistemic hierarchies), but as a step necessary to recognize, and hopefully avoid the processes that led to the crisis I came to know as Limón de la Cerca.

Were I to conduct an analysis of nutritional outcomes in a linear and scientifically prescribed manner I would simply contribute to the precipitation of such a crisis. Such an analysis would ignore those signs, hermeneutics and semiotics that make life “readable” for the *damnificados*, disregarding their priorities and replacing them with institutional exigencies whose satisfaction, I am certain, will not ameliorate the conditions faced by disaster survivors.

The Narrative Structure of Nutritional Epidemiology

The investigation of the intricate weaving of cultural and institutional narratives in nutritional epidemiology should not be interpreted as a case of misguided and fashionable criticism of science. It is simply an exercise necessary to recognize the system of order, discourse and episteme where this knowledge-making practice is formulated. Still, the reader may wonder why, despite my awareness of these narratives and the historicity of this system, I continue to refer to table 7-1. The reason this table continues to surface in this ethnography is because it lies at the nexus of a dialogue between the various forms of knowledge I engaged throughout the ethnography of Limón de la Cerca. What I am interested in exploring in the following pages are the relationships between the institutional, cultural and personal narratives in this reconstruction

community. It is at this nexus that an understanding of the relationship between materiality and semiotics of disaster reconstruction can finally be formulated.

The challenges of this effort are many. Among them is the avoidance of category hardening, or, in other words, the perpetuation of systems of signification and categorization characteristic of modern discourse through a claim to reflexivity. Another challenge is the dismissal of the knowledge hierarchy that has placed scientific measures at the top of a global epistemic ladder and narratives at the bottom. I plan to do this by approaching the following anthropometric and nutritional tables as elements of a historically and politically located story, a cultural narrative, about child growth and nutrition. In this case, by cultural narrative I mean a collective story that is rooted in the semiotics of a particular system of order and is told through a combination of daily interactions, the production of knowledge, the creation of epistemes, the institutionalization of behavioral prescriptions and academic production. As such, nutritional epidemiology ceases to be a universally-applicable means of accessing the objective “truths” of the world, and simply becomes an expression of a particular historicity, a genealogy and an episteme.

This is not the first time that anthropometry has appeared as a text in the anthropological literature. The famous debate surrounding the “small but healthy” hypothesis is an example of the stories scientists, economists and anthropologists have told, and continue to tell, through the bodies of children. The “small but healthy” debate centered on David Seckler’s (1982) proposition that low stature (categorized as stunting or low height for age in anthropometric indices) should not be equated with malnutrition, and that malnutrition should be diagnosed strictly on the basis of clinical signs (Martorell

1989). Seckler's ideas sparked controversy because height for age has, by and large, been accepted as a general indicator of overall community well-being in the public health world (citation from proposal). Following convention, stunting, at the population level, is considered reflective of long-term chronic malnutrition and disease, while low weight for height (wasting) is considered indicative of an acute phase of protein energy malnutrition or marasmus.

Following Seckler's logic, populations characterized by low stature (in comparison to international standards) could not be characterized as malnourished if other anthropometric outcomes – like weight for height- fell within the “healthy” margins of the accepted reference or did not present clinical signs of malnutrition. Stunting, then, was to be approached as an adaptive outcome that was not necessarily pathological. Taking objection to Seckler's hypothesis, biological anthropologist Reynaldo Martorell has commented that stunted bodies are statistically associated with decreased physiological performance and immunoincompetence, and increased morbidity. Stunting among poor populations- which are assumed, without hesitation, to be the groups in question- in turn, can be linked to infectious disease and low dietary intakes.

What I would like to add to this discussion is that the “small but healthy” debate focused on specific outcomes (infant morbidity, adult work capacity) whose merits are self evident and vested with meanings in a particular episteme (nutritional epidemiology, cultural materialism) but, in the process, leave the experiences, struggles and values of those deemed stunted and wasted beyond our perception. These outcomes also reiterate normative categories as the only universal and most effective means of speaking,

thinking and acting towards bodies, while simultaneously excluding other ways of conceptualizing, making and experiencing the body.

In the “small but healthy” debate the stunted are inadvertently reduced to a totalizing poverty. One could even venture to say that, in some cases, the stunted are made aware of their poverty, an action problematic onto itself. In this process, “most of the world” is reduced to a state of destitution, and the possibility that the “poor” and the “stunted” may possess knowledge systems, ontologies and discourses is effectively forgotten.

These statements should not be interpreted a suggestion that the relationship between sustenance and bodies is arbitrarily constructed. The problem lies in the normative assumption that nutritional science is the best, and perhaps the only way to think about, make knowledge about and act in relation to bodies. There is a relationship between the body and nourishment that I in no way suggest we ignore, and, in some circumstances, the outcome of this relationship- like emaciated bodies- is the product of power and discursive processes like colonialism that require the attention of applied anthropology. The child that is not fed will suffer and die regardless of her location, but stunting as a sign within the episteme of nutritional epidemiology has the potential of simplifying, if not concealing, the processes that result in such a materiality.

Stunting is also not *just* a pathological category, it is an object of knowledge within a broader story about bodies, a story that has a history, implicit assumptions, particular ontologies, and specific prescriptions. What’s more, although a valid concern, the emphasis on the surveillance and management of human life is not necessarily a self evident universal, it is a criterion of governance that emerged historically through the

Enlightenment and is not necessarily shared by all systems of knowledge (Foucault 1970). This is not to say that other epistemes are not concerned with bodies and their nourishment, but the subjects that are characteristic of their realities may defy western ideas of personhood and individual rights.

Some additional concerns with the narrative of nutritional epidemiology include the determination of what constitutes a proper diet or body, what does not, and the semiotic associations between “non-modern” foodways, tradition and deficiency. These linkages are sustained through the reiteration of narratives that have been told by anthropologists and nutritionists. A case in point is protein-energy malnutrition. In his biological compendium, *Human Adaptation and accommodation* (1993), Roberto Frisnacho details the molecular specifics of protein-energy malnutrition. According to nutritional science, the human body is incapable of independently metabolizing 9 essential amino acids, and they must be acquired from dietary sources. When three of these amino acids (valine, leucine and isoleucine) are not consumed in sufficient quantities, the body begins to break down muscle tissue where these amino acids are present, and makes them available for other critical metabolic functions. Frisnacho deals with the elements under discussion- amino acids, muscle tissue, protein- as fetishes, that is, things in themselves, thought to be devoid of cultural signification, meaning and history.

The amino acid in Frisnacho’s explanation of protein energy malnutrition parallels the way we have come to understand the gene in North America (Haraway 1997). The gene appears in North American legislation, popular culture and scientific publications as the ultimate, pre-discursive object upon which nature is constructed. As

such, the gene is thought to be devoid of social value and meanings, and nature, in turn, is thought of as constructed from building blocks whose order can be re-arranged in infinite ways. It is for this reason that Donna Haraway writes about the gene as existing in a “nature of no nature, and the culture of no culture.”

Although the gene is materialized and acted upon on the basis of these fundamental suppositions, the semiotics of molecular biology suggest that the ways in which we have come to think about and act in relation to the gene become possible only as a result of a particular hermeneutic process. This process involves the historicity of authorship, private property, and particular power relations between governments and the corporate technology industrial complex in western society. In this context, the gene is a literary technology, materialized in the framework of transcription, replication and inscription. Like the letters of the alphabet, the gene writes life, and can be used through molecular technologies, to write reality itself. The gene, Haraway notes, is therefore not simply *the gene*, an object onto itself, the ultimate source of inscription through which life and reality can be written, but is a hybrid saturated in conventions that entail behavioral, legal and political prescriptions that are specific to a particular system of order.

The relationship between amino acids, fatty acids and muscle tissue as fetishes, then, serves as the foundation for nutritional fact. It is from this fact that purportedly universal dietary recommendations, like the food pyramid, are made. The food pyramid makes stipulations as to the quantities of particular food categories that are recommended as part of an optimal diet. The merit of this call towards normalization is substantiated on

the claim that it operates at a transcendental level of things in themselves and is therefore universally applicable.

Nevertheless, there is ethnographic evidence that suggests that other dietary compositions, including those that do not have the variety of the food pyramid and do not observe similar categorizations of food groups, are capable of providing the essential nutrients necessary to sustain human life. Moreover, the need to sustain individual human life as a central convention of a knowledge system is, in itself, a criterion specific to the modern episteme through which some of the essential functions of power are served in state societies (Foucault 1980, 1990). Non-modern systems are, of course also capable of sustaining, and, on occasion, putting an end to human life, but this process is does not become a fundamental mantra around which social order is created and exercised. Of course, the maintenance of human life, like humanism, is laden with paradoxes and politics of exclusion that deem some lives more worthy than others, some forms of humanity more human than others, and some forms of being simply unviable.

Non-modern foodways are not devised using scientific measures, and the meanings and categorizations of their food groups do not correlate strictly with those of clinical nutritionists (i.e. protein, energy, micronutrients, carbohydrate, dietary fiber). They also operate within epistemes whose practices are organized on the basis of different conventions, and, on the bases of these, the practices are deemed effective. By writing this I do not necessarily challenge the merits of scientific food tables; what concerns me are the positivist claims of exclusive access to a culture-less nature that is implicit in nutritional science, the cultural narratives that are told through its products, the prescriptions that it makes possible and the ways of being that it excludes.

To return to the issue of the small but healthy hypothesis, I must state, in all fairness, that Reynaldo Martorell makes no associations between non-western epistemes and deficiency in his writings. He is primarily concerned with the impacts of marginalization and social inequality on the body. Nonetheless, the absence of reflexivity in this perspective leaves the concept of normativity in nutritional epidemiology beyond the scope of critical analysis. Inevitably the debate surrounding the small but healthy hypothesis is associated with a call in nutritional science for adherence to a norm in growth patterns. Normalization, in turn, becomes particularly problematic when its associated prescriptions omit other forms of signification and action. Being signified as stunted in the public health world, is followed by a clinical prescription that brings the child into the domain of biomedical epistemology, an event that has the potential to sever it from family, locality and social network. Stunting, in Martorell's writing, is associated with the "vast majority of the world". This "vast majority" is, in turn, associated with a poverty that, in the eyes of the epidemiologist, stems beyond material scarcity. It is a dearth of knowledge, meaning and history. As we saw in the previous section on illness narratives, these prescriptions can arouse anxiety and resistance as they can threaten not only the existence of other epistemes, but can also bring about a crisis that threatens the child's materiality.

This approach does not negate the relationship that nutritional science as a narrative has towards the pre-discursive world. As stated before, a body deprived of nourishment will certainly wither and die in any setting. What this approach recognizes, however, is the existence of other schemes of order where the pre-discursive is read through a different system of signs and semiotic linkages. Furthermore, to solely evaluate

any one system or reality on the merits of another's criteria is to perpetuate a system of colonial translation that does not suit the needs of the *damnificados*, and may, in fact, precipitate a crisis. Consequently, in this chapter I use nutritional epidemiology as another narrative that, when combined with other forms of narrative knowledge, deprived of its hierarchical position and reductionistic prescriptions, can help us tell a story about the *damnificados* of Southern Honduras, albeit it is a story that becomes intelligible through a specific history and politics of knowledge, and not an exclusive access to the truths of the body.

In the midst of this discussion, I still recognize the role that marginalizing processes can play in shaping bodies, and the cross-cultural signification of the life-sustaining role of food. As the case of Limón de la Cerca indicates, marginalizing processes however, are inseparable from systems of signification that create differences through the mobilization of tropes, discourses, and material resources. This is the reason table 7-1 has accompanied us throughout this ethnography. As a medical anthropologist trained in nutritional epidemiology, anthropometric indicators are part of a cultural narrative about the body that is historically and culturally intelligible to me. It is part of a particular episteme that has helped me formulate critical questions about disaster reconstruction in Central America. These questions, in turn, initiated a dialogue with *damnificados* that went well beyond the modest measurement of heights, weights and skin folds. I present the following tables and their accompanying commentaries, then, with the provision that they are hereby deprived of any positivist claims -they do not measure or observe some objective world any better or more holistically than the stories told to me by disaster survivors, assistance agency personnel and local government

functionaries- and that they are part of a discourse whose meanings and categories make particular sense to individuals in a specific historical, technological and political location. In effect, they constitute another narrative, like those of agency workers and disaster survivors, which has helped me in my quest for an understanding of the reconstruction encounter in Southern Honduras.

Although it may seem incredible, table 7-1 has agency. Its results urged me to pick Limón de la Cerca, the research site with the highest levels of chronic and acute malnutrition in 1999, as the research site for this ethnography. I dedicated the ten months that followed our 1999 pilot study to the design of a research agenda that would generate the knowledge needed to understand the causes of the perceived physiological differences. Originally, the research was conceptualized within the theoretical framework of political ecology. Following a bio-social approach it was my hypothesis that the anthropometric dimensions we had recorded were shaped by the interaction of social systems, environment and human biology. Somewhere in the intersection of history, policy, body and the local/global macro-society, the bodies of children in Limón de la Cerca were being transformed, and I wanted to understand precisely how this occurred.

Still, This project design lacked symmetry and operated on a number of positivist assumptions. The design assumed that concepts like “environment” and “human biology” were pre-discursively constituted, and that these concepts comprised the real and ultimate material foundation upon which discourses, ideologies and politics were constructed. Ironically, in the process of conducting this ethnography, the relationship between environment, biology, nature and nutrition in relation to reconstruction discourse and postcolonial politics emerged as one similar to that outlined by Judith Butler between

sex and gender. To loosely paraphrase Butler: Environment, nature, and nutrition, and bodies emerged in this locality as “regulatory ideal[s]” whose materialization was compelled, and whose materialization took place (or failed to take place) through “certain highly regulated practices” (Butler 1993). The reality of environment, nature and nutrition, then, appeared to me more a processes by which “regulatory norms materialize and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms”, than a self evident fact upon whose mechanics lay the solution to the problem of disaster reconstruction (Butler 1993:2). From this perspective, materiality and reality are simultaneously essential parts of discourse and are discursive elements materialized through the projection of discursive norms.

Prior to this paradigm shift, the original research design operated on the certainty that there was an ultimate reconstruction world out there, and that public health methodologies were the best means of understanding it. The initial design allowed little space for the consideration of the semiotic domain of reconstruction, a place where tropes, discourses and cultural narratives coalesced to determine what types of evidence could qualify as real, simultaneously shaping human cognition and reality.

Anthropometry

In the fall of 2001 and the spring of 2002 I would apply the selected methods in Limón de la Cerca and Marcelino Champagnat. Once again, using the bodies of children as a barometer of community wellness the University of Florida research team collected anthropometric measures of 230 children in three research sites. The sites were Limón de la Cerca (N=111), Marcelino Champagnat (N=49), and eight hurricane affected *barrios* of Choluteca (N=70), with the latter serving as a control group. The measures were taken

following standardized techniques (Lohman et al. 1988) and analyzed using the Centers for Disease Control EpiInfo 2000 anthropometric analysis program. The results of our anthropometric survey are shown in tables 7-2 and 7-3.

Table 7-2 Comparison of height for age (HAZ), weight for age (WAZ) and weight for height (WHZ) z-score means by research site.

<u>Location</u>	<u>HAZ</u>	<u>WAZ</u>	<u>WHZ</u>	<u>N</u>
Choluteca neighborhoods	-.5497	-.8254	-.5164	70
Marcelino Champagnat	-1.0177	-1.0373	-.4719	50
Limon de la Cerca	-1.4893	-1.3218	-.4768	110
<i>One-way ANOVA</i>	<i>P= .000</i>	<i>P= .028</i>	<i>P= .965</i>	

Table 7-2 suggests that the height for age (stunting) and weight for age (underweight) z-score mean of children in the two resettlement sites (Limón de la Cerca, Marcelino Champagnat) were lower than those of children living in the hurricane affected neighborhoods of Choluteca. The least favorable measures for both of these indicators were also found in Limón de la Cerca, suggesting an overall lower level of children's and community wellness. Finally, there was no statistically significant difference between the samples in the weight for height (wasting) z-score means.

Table 7-3 Comparison of stunting, underweight and wasting prevalence by research site.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Stunting</u>			<u>Underweight</u>			<u>Wasting</u>			<u>N</u>
	<-3	<-2	Total%	<-3	<-2	Total%	<-3	<-2	Total%	
Choluteca neighborhoods			10.0			14.3			5.7	70
Marcelino Champagnat			18.8			27.1			8.3	50
Limon de la Cerca			27.9			28.8			3.6	110
<i>Chi-square</i>			<i>P= .014</i>			<i>P= .071</i>			<i>P= .459</i>	

Table 7-2 tells a similar story. With respect to stunting and underweight prevalence, the Cholutecan neighborhoods sample features a lower proportion of mild to moderate malnutrition, suggesting a relatively better nutritional status, and, by

extrapolation, overall conditions in this locality. Prevalence measures for underweight do differ from underweight means in that there was no statistical difference between the Marcelino Champagnat and Limón de la Cerca samples. It must also be noted that the comparison of anthropometric outcomes in Limón de la Cerca with our 1999 pilot study revealed no statistically significant differences.

The story told by the preceding tables outlines a number of differences between Limón de la Cerca, the hurricane affected neighborhoods of Choluteca, Marcelino Champagnat and other hurricane affected areas of Honduras. As part of a reality whose signs are particularly legible to me, an anthropologist trained in nutritional epidemiology, these differences beckoned me to ask a number of questions. Why were there differences in the anthropometric indicators of these three localities? Why did conditions seem to be much more favorable in the neighborhoods of Choluteca, and what was the nature of the ambivalent differences between Marcelino Champagnat and Limón de la Cerca?

The differences between the localities were not only present in the form of signs of nutritional discourse, but also manifested themselves as street gang graffiti, an unfinished electrification project and the alienation of residents in Limón de la Cerca. The latter signs, of course, are excluded from the nutritional narrative, and they remain invisible and non-existent in the tables under discussion. Still, it was upon these signs (the graffiti, the light posts, the collapsing houses, the small house lots) that Limón de la Cerca residents relied on to narrate their experiences in the reconstruction community. As this ethnography progressed, it was the semiotics of these latter signs that came to preoccupy my questions concerning disaster mitigation in Southern Honduras, a transition that would urge me to emphasize the encounter between discourses as the

location of practice with the greatest potential for the transformation of disaster reconstruction.

In response to the stated questions, the narratives of the *damnificados* (see chapters 3 and 4) suggested that the differences between the localities emerged through the deployment of institutional discourses of reconstruction and their accompanying aesthetics of vulgarity, to use Achille Mbembe's (2001) terms. This is to say that a particular discursive framework and its system of significations and practices made a certain materiality possible in which bodies took certain actions, were mobilized in particular ways, and came to take certain shapes, becoming signs in a discursive system of power-knowledge.

Dietary Intake

As part of our nutritional enquiry the University of Florida research team also collected nutritional consumption information in the form of household weekly dietary recalls from the homes of the measured children. The results of these are summarized in tables 7-4 and 7-5 as energy and protein intake for the surveyed households.

In table 7-4 energy analysis is presented as a comparison of energy needs ratio (ENR) averages for the three research sites. ENR values were calculated by dividing the total number of calories reported as consumed by a household in the seven day recalls by the total caloric requirements of all household members following the INCAP nutritional recommendations for gender and age groups (INCAP 1991). Household energy and protein consumption was calculated using a program developed by James P. Stansbury that was based on the nutrient content estimates of Central American foods calculated by the Institute of nutrition of Central America and Panama (INCAP 1996). Special

allotments were made for pregnant or lactating female survey respondents, but not for other female household members, allowing for an undetermined margin of error in the reported ENRs. Energy intake in this table is also disaggregated by the contribution of food groups to caloric consumption.

Table 7.4 Average household energy needs ratio (ENR) and composition of caloric intake by research site.

Research Site	ENR Mean	%Cereal	%Beans	%Tuber	%Animal	%Vegetable	%Fruit	%Other
Choluteca neighborhoods	1.2834	.3077	.05937	.01537	.1881	.02867	.05096	.3498
Marcelino Champagnat	1.1978	.4144	.08524	.01466	.1477	.02342	.0411	.2734
Limon de la Cerca	1.4086	.3699	.0835	.01467	.1434	.009496	.04328	.3357
<i>One-way ANOVA</i>	<i>P=</i> .022	.000	.000	.904	.001	.000	.131	.000

Two cases, one in the hurricane-affected neighborhoods of Choluteca and one in Marcelino Champagnat were omitted due to extremely low ENR values (those falling beneath 50% of the INCAP recommendation). It is also important to mention that ENR and PNR values are a gross estimate of household consumption and do not provide information of how food is distributed within a household. ENR values also do not tell us about eating patterns beyond the household, especially foods eaten in restaurants, other houses, and fast food stands.

The ENR mean comparison for the three regions suggests that there is a statistically significant difference ($P < .05$) between the sites. Surprisingly, Limón de la Cerca featured the highest value. An independent samples t-test between the ENR mean of hurricane affected neighborhoods of Choluteca and Limón de la Cerca did not yield a statistically significant difference ($P = .095$), while the t-test comparison of means between the latter and Marcelino Champagnat did ($P = .008$).

Table 7-4 also presents a numeric summary of diet composition. The table suggests there were notable differences between the sites. In the hurricane affected neighborhoods of Choluteca, cereals and beans provided a lower caloric contribution to household diet, while animal, vegetable and fruit sources of calories constituted a larger proportion of nutritional intake than in the resettlement communities.

In the context of my ethnographic experience and the narratives of *damnificados* in Marcelino Champagnat and Limón de la Cerca, the higher ENR average for Limon de la Cerca is unexpected. Historical factors certainly affected data collection. In the time that elapsed between the collection of the two samples (2 months), Central America was affected by a severe drought, raising the cost of basic grains in Choluteca by 25% (Fieldnotes 2001). Nonetheless, diet composition in Limón de la Cerca seems to fit within the broader ethnographic context. The markedly low contribution of vegetables to caloric intake (.009%), the somewhat lower contribution of animal sources, and the higher contribution of cereals and beans may be interpreted as a less diverse diet in which prestige foods (animal products like eggs and meat) make a lower contribution.

Table 7-5 Average household protein needs ratio (PNR) and protein intake composition by research site.

Research Site	PNR Mean	%Cereal	%Bean	%Tuber	%Animal	%Vegetables	%Fruit	%Other
Choluteca neighborhoods	3.1143	.2592	.1333	.01423	.3751	.03689	.03491	.1463
Marcelino Champagnat	2.9081	.3439	.1916	.01413	.2861	.03114	.02471	.1084
Ciudad Nueva	3.3564	.3127	.1906	.01479	.2896	.01296	.02265	.1566
<i>One-way ANOVA</i>	<i>P= .07</i>	<i>.001</i>	<i>.000</i>	<i>.902</i>	<i>.000</i>	<i>.000</i>	<i>.001</i>	<i>.006</i>

Table 7-5 presents a similar summary of diet composition for protein intake. As in the case of household caloric intake, the difference in average PNR for the research sites is not significant between Limon de la Cerca and the hurricane-affected neighborhoods of

Choluteca ($P=.2$ for the independent samples t -test), but it is significant between Limon de la Cerca and Marcelino Champagnat ($P=.018$), with the former having the more favorable value. In the hurricane affected neighborhoods, cereals and beans provide a lower contribution to household protein intake, while animal sources provide a greater contribution than in the resettlement communities.

Of course, one may argue that a difference between the sites proves nothing, and that in the absence of a longitudinal multivariate analysis, it is not possible to discern whether the differences may be attributed to a pre-existing secular trend, individualized micro-level variables like maternal education and paternal employment or structural macro-level ones like institutional policies and practices.

Keeping the multivariate analysis that is hereby prescribed and the critical reservations outlined above, we move on to the analysis of socio-economic and demographic indicators (maternal education, the education of male partners or heads of household, and material style of life indices, dependency ratio, adult sex ratios) collected in our surveys.

Table 7-6 Comparison of material style of life index (MSL) and dependency ratio (D.R. $\leq 16 / > 16$) means by research site.

Research Site	MSL	D.R.	N
Choluteca neighborhoods	3.82	1.08	70
Marcelino Champagnat	2.49	1.58	50
Limon de la Cerca	1.67	1.51	111
<i>One-way ANOVA</i>	$P=.000$	$P=.002$	

Material style of life index measures were calculated from a twelve item scale that included corn mills, refrigerators, radios, televisions, stereos, wash basins, irons, sewing machines, bicycles, stoves, beds and automobiles. The index was developed following

Poggie and DeWalt's (1992) procedures where each item is weighed in reverse relation to the proportion of households that own each item. In this case item weights were generated using the proportion of ownership in the neighborhoods of Choluteca, where there was a greater range of items owned. For example, if 85% of the households in the neighborhoods of Choluteca reported owning a radio, then this item would be assigned a weighed value of .15 in the cumulative scale. Household dependency ratios were calculated by dividing the number of people over 16 years of age by the number of people under 16 years of age in each household.

Table 7-6 tells us that the residents of hurricane-affected neighborhoods of Choluteca had more possessions at the time of the survey than those of Marcelino Champagnat and Limón de la Cerca, with the latter having the least. These differences were also statistically significant. Table 7-6 also adds demographic details to the emerging representation of *damnificados* in Choluteca. Both of the reconstruction communities have markedly higher dependency ratio means, indicating a greater number of infants and young adolescents per adult in each household. In the case of this indicator, Marcelino Champagnat households seem to have, on the average, more dependents per household than Limón de la Cerca households.

Community educational indicators were calculated as the mean years of education completed by one female and one male adult resident of each surveyed household. Female household members were chosen if they were either the mother of the anthropometric survey's focal child or the primary care-taker. Male household members were chosen if they were either the father of the focal child, the husband or partner of the female care-taker, or the eldest male resident. Table 7-7 tells us that the chosen male and

female residents of Cholutecan hurricane-affected neighborhoods had more years of education than those of the two reconstruction communities, with Limón de la Cerca having the lowest indicators.

Table 7-7 Comparison of female survey respondent and male partners or male heads of household years of education means.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Mean Female Education</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean Male Education</u>	<u>N</u>
Choluteca Neighborhoods	6.32	68	6.86	66
Marcelino Champagnat	4.51	49	5.36	39
Limon de la Cerca	3.93	108	3.83	94
<i>One-Way Anova</i>	<i>P= .000</i>		<i>P= .000</i>	

The bivariate relationships between anthropometric, nutritional and demographic variables are presented in tables 7-8 through 7-10 in the form of pearson correlation tables for the three samples (Choluteca neighborhoods, Marcelino Champagnat and Limón de la Cerca). Below, I list some of the correlations for the Limón de la Cerca sample that I think are of particular interest to this analysis. While these correlations do not exhaust the statistically significant results of the correlation tables, they do summarize the general trends in nutritional consumption at this site. Pearson correlation results for Marcelino Champagnat and hurricane affected neighborhoods of Choluteca are presented in tables 7-9. through 7-10 for the purposes of comparison, but are not discussed below.

Among the anthropometric indicators, an increase in the percentage of caloric content obtained from beans seems to be moderately negatively correlated with the height for age (-.248**) and weight for age (-.224*) of the measured children. It must be noted, however, that nutritional information in this analysis is descriptive of household intake,

Table 7-8. Pearson correlations for Limón de la Cerca

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Weekly expenses														
2. HAZ			.26	-.97	-.069	.189	.103	-.134	.12	-.9	.89	.211*	.019	.101
3. WHZ		-.17	.13	.693*	.064	.046	.128	-.003	-.248**	-.006	.119	.02	.071	.116
4. WAZ				.693*	-.033	.083	-.062	-.104	-.061	-.292**	.063	.092	.061	.125
5. Child age					.008	.102	.060	-.042	-.224*	-.202	.022	.149	.030	.126
6. MSL						.267**	.056	-.307**	.109	-.092	.219*	.237*	.211*	.153
7. ENR							.120	-.143	-.154	-.034	.195*	.249**	.040	.084
8. Percentage cereal calories								-.035	-.192*	-.020	.022	-.016	.057	.089
9. Percentage bean calories									-.018	-.178	-.629**	-.306**	-.480**	-.727**
10. Percentage tuber calories										.064	-.132	-.088	-.020	-.241*
11. Percentage animal calories											.172	.116	.120	-.049
12. Percentage vegetable calories												.242*	.276**	.059
13. Percentage fruit calories													.344**	.099
14. Percentage other calories														.149
15. PNR														
16. Percentage cereal protein														
17. Percentage bean protein														
18. Percentage tuber protein														
19. Percentage animal protein														
20. Percentage vegetable protein														
21. Percentage fruit protein														
22. Percentage other protein														
23. Dependency ratio														
24. Adult sex ratio														
25. Female education														
26. Male education														

*p<.05

**p<.005

Table 7-8. Continued.

<i>Variable</i>	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
1. Weekly expenses	.114	-.118	-.002	-.076	.139	.173	-.016	-.024	.053	.008	-.035	.195
2. HAZ	.116	.021	-.239	.030	.050	.142	.030	.076	-.065	-.177	.054	.004
3. WHZ	-.101	-.082	-.066	-.266**	.066	.083	.051	.092	-.040	.121	.164	.000
4. WAZ	.018	-.011	-.217*	-.151	.063	.159	.044	.099	-.076	-.033	.136	.014
5. Child age	.078-.273**	.125	-.033	-.033	.208*	.225*	.151	-.042	-.032	-.098	.211	.128
6. MSL	.076	-.105	-.162	-.045	.231*	.245**	.060	-.059	-.307**	.207*	.349**	.298*
7. ENR	.936**	-.003	-.194*	-.009	.062	-.003	.064	.068	-.164	-.117	-.039	.070
8. Percentage cereal calories	-.096	.968**	.009	-.206*	-.648**	-.294**	-.366**	-.374**	.152	.050	-.164	-.046
9. Percentage bean calories	-.073	-.125	.962**	.104	-.217*	-.128	-.102	-.294**	.147	-.169	-.194*	-.019
10. Percentage tuber calories	.019	-.191*	.043	.826**	.174	.094	.153	-.126	.161	-.186	-.071	-.070
11. Percentage animal calories	.167	-.667**	-.252**	.116	.947**	.174	.098	-.174	.216*	.077	.140	.119
12. Percentage vegetable calories	-.053	-.233*	-.071	.192*	.318**	.972**	.318**	-.211*	-.158	-.127	.089	.020
13. Percentage fruit calories	.039	-.438**	.008	.133	.248**	.348**	.840**	.069	-.038	-.234*	.146	-.202
14. Percentage other calories	.025	-.630**	-.182	.025	.157	.151	.198*	.759**	-.097	.021	.150	.042
15. PNR		-.128	-.142	-.009	.182	-.075	.001	.059	-.125	-.132	-.075	.052
16. Percentage cereal protein			-.055	-.188*	-.674**	-.195*	-.297**	-.356**	.135	.079	-.112	-.024
17. Percentage bean protein				.114		-.327**	-.077	-.046	-.292	.178	-.196	-.006
18. Percentage tuber protein					.158	.191*	.161	-.195*	.092	-.151	-.090	-.042
19. Percentage animal protein						.253*	.103	-.187	-.262**	.063	.144	.113
20. Percentage vegetable protein							.341**	-.179	-.133	-.134	.095	.014
21. Percentage fruit protein								.076	-.018	-.155	.155	-.237
22. Percentage other protein									.022	.010	.098	-.061
23. Dependency ratio										-.092	-.182	-.044
24. Adult sex ratio												.218*
25. Female education												
26. Male education												

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .005$

Table 7-9. Pearson correlations for Marcelino Champagnat.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Weekly expenses														
2. HAZ	.150													
3. WHZ	.206	.181	.356*	.316	.121									
4. WAZ	.384**	.819**	-.162	.108	-.039	.065	-.350	-.366*	.086	.408*	.113	.224	.232	
5. Child age		.827**	-.123	.085	-.080	-.028	.022	-.130	.186	-.232	-.101	-.006	.108	
6. MSL			-.163	.098	-.046	.024	.035	-.112	.051	-.209	-.259	.041		
7. ENR				.183	-.002	-.091	-.107	.148	.087	-.079	.122	.056		
8. Percentage cereal calories					.103	-.238	-.288*	.161	.278	.073	-.031	.222		
9. Percentage bean calories						-.341*	-.317*	.228	.328*	.301*	.186	.233		
10. Percentage tuber calories							.476**	-.359*	-.786**	-.638**	-.729**			
11. Percentage animal calories								-.071	-.476**	-.365**	-.267	-.555*		
12. Percentage vegetable calories									.225	.358*	.513**	.036		
13. Percentage fruit calories										.410*	.501*	.288*		
14. Percentage other calories											.431*	.277		
15. FNR													.192	
16. Percentage cereal protein														
17. Percentage bean protein														
18. Percentage tuber protein														
19. Percentage animal protein														
20. Percentage vegetable protein														
21. Percentage fruit protein														
22. Percentage other protein														
23. Dependency ratio														
24. Adult sex ratio														
25. Female education														
26. Male education														

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .005$

Table 7-9. Continued.

Variable	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
1. Weekly expenses	.097	-.294	-.360*	-.105	.358*	.143	.080	.135	.004	-.037	-.051	.301
2. HAZ	-.080	.094	.081	-.025	-.060	-.115	-.106	-.059	.282	-.012	-.074	.188
3. WHZ	-.007	-.064	-.037	-.132	.121	-.256	-.159	.054	.116	-.051	-.068	.133
4. WAZ	-.011	.011	.026	-.089	.035	-.189	-.166	.006	.239	-.088	-.101	.176
5. Child age	.053	-.111	-.140	-.004	-.041	-.123	.074	.382**	.060	-.070	.125	-.050
6. MSL	.078	-.168	-.267	.030	.350*	.117	-.016	-.115	.036	-.210	.275	.131
7. ENR	.939*	-.233	-.239	.201	.333*	.366**	.182	-.145	-.363*	-.170	.079	.241
8. Percentage cereal calories	-.381*	.965**	.526**	-.309*	-.828**	-.557**	-.526**	.322*	.021	.225	-.238	-.208
9. Percentage bean calories	-.244	.349*	.958**	-.077	-.582**	-.446**	-.106	-.290*	.040	.183	-.280	-.270
10. Percentage tuber calories	.217	-.341*	-.044	.914**	.237	.369**	.518**	-.173	-.329*	-.129	.118	-.149
11. Percentage animal calories	.461**	-.795**	-.600**	.165	.944**	.363*	.299*	.029	-.021	-.179	.208	.203
12. Percentage vegetable calories	.346*	-.543**	-.416**	.277	.526**	.966**	.217	.047	-.235	-.196	-.013	-.015
13. Percentage fruit calories	.252	-.660**	-.316	.422**	.540**	.420**	.882**	.024	-.159	-.089	.182	-.010
14. Percentage other calories	.127	-.611	-.489**	.068	.409**	.394*	.203	.600**	.101	-.186	.223	.266
15. PNR		-.333	-.240	.146	.414**	.346*	.197	-.105	-.314*	-.170	.072	.206
16. Percentage cereal protein			.461**	-.272	-.815**	-.523**	-.533**	-.357*	.028	.182	-.209	-.158
17. Percentage bean protein				-.030	-.678*	-.446**	-.100	-.359*	.028	.185	-.298*	-.224
18. Percentage tuber protein					.183	.317*	.462**	-.198	-.336*	-.162	.073	-.126
19. Percentage animal protein						.511**	.349*	-.016	-.028	-.143	.251	.277
20. Percentage vegetable protein							.257	.040	-.239	-.191	.052	.060
21. Percentage fruit protein								-.058	-.076	-.103	.176	.039
22. Percentage other protein									.099	-.128	.107	-.014
23. Dependency ratio										-.140	.090	.104
24. Adult sex ratio											.113	.034
25. Female education												.288
26. Male education												

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .005$

Table 7-10. Pearson correlations for hurricane-affected neighborhoods of Cholulteca.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Weekly expenses														
2. HAZ	.106													
3. WHZ	.173	.149												
4. WAZ		.175	.166											
5. Child age		.678*	-.001	.194										
6. MSL		.798**	-.203	-.053	-.033									
7. ENR			-.168	.054	-.022	.012	.107	.057	.125	-.051	-.136	-.102		
8. Percentage cereal calories				.084	-.077	.000	-.207	-.167	-.090	.112	.054	.112		
9. Percentage bean calories					.034	-.440**	-.139	.259*	.580**	.403**	.104	.033		
10. Percentage tuber calories						-.406*	-.147	.159	.295*	.075	.196	.244*		
11. Percentage animal calories							.292*	-.286*	-.625**	-.478**	-.414**	-.647**		
12. Percentage vegetable calories								-.075	-.230	-.033	-.381**	-.354**		
13. Percentage fruit calories									.393**	.174	.075	-.075		
14. Percentage other calories										.455**	.342**	-.117		
15. PNR											.298*	.015		
16. Percentage cereal protein												.036		
17. Percentage bean protein														
18. Percentage tuber protein														
19. Percentage animal protein														
20. Percentage vegetable protein														
21. Percentage fruit protein														
22. Percentage other protein														
23. Dependency ratio														
24. Adult sex ratio														
25. Female education														
26. Male education														

*p<.05

**p<.005

Table 7-10. Continued.

Variable	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
1. Weekly expenses	.166	-.146	-.328*	.095	.303*	.238	.042	-.065	-.001	.031	.338**	.317*
2. HAZ	.014	-.118	.002	.009	.156*	.109	-.050	-.076	-.127	.009	.142	.262*
3. WHZ	.019	.020	.121	.191	-.069	-.218	-.225	.077	-.029	.116	.112	-.058
4. WAZ	.031	-.055	.123	.134	.028	-.088	-.193	.005	-.106	.049	.163	.101
5. Child age	-.219	.004	-.150	-.171	.061	.162	.183	-.055	.139	-.037	.085	-.095
6. MSL	.212	-.473**	-.252*	.033	.495**	.329**	-.009	.058	-.197	.205	.569**	.604**
7. ENR	.841**	-.348**	-.144	.018	.382**	.057	.097	-.004	-.096	-.236	.077	.281*
8. Percentage cereal calories	-.360**	.937**	.326**	-.185	-.700**	-.455**	-.259*	-.364**	.240*	.065	-.402	-.535*
9. Percentage bean calories	.069	.138	.945**	-.158	-.419**	-.164	-.256*	-.140	.095	-.099	-.142	-.239
10. Percentage tuber calories	.324**	-.379**	-.166	.854**	.334**	.071	-.067	.076	-.078	.029	.154	.187
11. Percentage animal calories	.533**	-.735**	-.409**	.233	.901**	.306*	.081	-.103	-.241*	-.136	.322*	.509*
12. Percentage vegetable calories	.236	-.507**	-.138	.127	.420**	.934**	.039	-.022	-.188	-.080	.280*	.195
13. Percentage fruit calories	.152	-.390**	-.404**	.043	.417**	.308*	.721**	-.039	-.124	-.158	.235	.045
14. Percentage other calories	-.086	-.433**	-.213	-.025	.097	.155	.137	.582**	-.074	.102	.175	.258*
15. PNR		-.447**	-.059	.111	.436**	.082	-.005	.010	-.080	-.230	.128	.351*
16. Percentage cereal protein			.251*	-.246*	-.726**	-.390**	-.195	-.386**	.193	.159	-.408**	-.525*
17. Percentage bean protein				-.186	-.549**	-.191	-.202	-.157	.060	-.060	-.140	.272*
18. Percentage tuber protein					.216	.333**	.147	.055	-.064	.011	.044	.080
19. Percentage animal protein								-.186	-.218	-.161	-.280*	.448*
20. Percentage vegetable protein								-.076	-.168	-.027	.286*	.170
21. Percentage fruit protein							.083	-.045	-.168	-.062	.152	-.028
22. Percentage other protein								-.081	.096	.074	.167	.262*
23. Dependency ratio										-.102	-.394**	-.151
24. Adult sex ratio											-.034	.076
25. Female education												.482**
26. Male education												

*P<.05

**P<.005

and not the individual child. Such correlations, then, are stated at the risk of committing an ecological fallacy- that is, correlating across levels of analysis.

In terms of diet composition, energy needs ratio (ENR) had a weak negative correlation with the percentage calories contributed by beans in Limón de la Cerca households (-.192*). The percentage of caloric intake derived from animal sources correlated negatively with the percentage of caloric intake contributed by cereals (-.629**) and there was a weak correlation between the caloric contribution of animal foods and vegetables (.242*).

Dietary outcomes also correlated with socioeconomic indicators like MSL indices and household composition ratios. There were weak and moderate correlations between material style of life scores and the percentage calories contributed by animal sources (.195*), household weekly food expenditures and the percentage calories contributed by vegetables (.249**), female education and the percentage calories contributed by beans (-.194), and dependency ratio scores and percentage calories contributed by animal sources (-.262*).

Together, these correlations suggest that wealthier households obtain a greater percentage of their caloric intake from animal and vegetable sources. The consumption of animal sources, in turn, is inversely related to the percentage calories obtained from cereals, and households with a greater number of dependents obtain a lower percentage of their caloric intake from animal sources. Smaller, wealthier households, then, seem to consume more prestige foods (meat and dairy products, vegetables), than less wealthy households that attain a greater percentage of their caloric intake from cereals. On the basis of these correlations, it is assumed for the purposes of this analysis that greater

percentages of caloric intake derived from animal and vegetable sources are indicative of greater nutritional diversity and a better overall economic standing.

Beyond diet composition, the correlation tables for Limón de la Cerca also suggest relationships between household composition, education and wealth. There is a moderate correlation between MSL scores household dependency ratios (-.307*) and adult sex ratios (.207*) . This suggests that households with more dependents have less possessions, and households with more adult males in proportion to adult females have more possessions. In addition, the education of both adult females (.349**) and adult males (.298*) correlated positively with MSL index values.

As the next step in this analysis, a series of setpwise multivariate regression models were designed. These concentrated particularly on the differences in anthropometric outcomes and sources of caloric intake (vegetable, animal and cereals, see table 7-4) between Limón de la Cerca and the two other research sites. For the analysis of anthropometric data, height for age, weight for height and weight for age z scores were used as the dependent variables. Independent variables included weekly household food expenditures, dependency ratios, adult sex ratios, household size, adult female education, adult male education, research site, MSL indices, ENR, percentage calories obtained from cereal sources, percentage calories obtained from animal sources, percentage calories obtained from vegetable sources and PNR. Independent variables were chosen with the purpose of controlling for research site, economic and educational factors. Household food expenditures were modified as log base 10 values to control for outliers and transform relationships with independent variables into percentage change.

One case was omitted from the analysis for being an extreme outlier in terms of weekly food expenditures.

In the case of height for age z-scores, the percentage of calories attained from vegetable sources and adult male education demonstrated positive, statistically significant relationships with children's heights (see table 7-11). Although the percentage calories obtained from vegetable sources had a statistically significant relationship with height for age z-scores, it is important to repeat that this independent variable represents household consumption, and says little about the focal child's nutritional habits in particular. This, and other associations between nutritional intake and anthropometry must therefore be interpreted with caution.

Substituting height for age with weight for age z-scores as the dependent variable in this model provided different results for the regression analysis. Dependency ratio and MSL scores were the only variables with statistically significant relationships, with the latter having a positive relation with weight for age z scores, and the former a negative relation (table 7-11).

Using weight for height as the dependent variable in stepwise regression yielded no statistically significant outcomes. However, when the same list of independent variables listed above were arbitrarily included in a non-stepwise regression both the log base 10 of weekly household food expenditures and the percentage calories from vegetable sources featured statistically significant relationships with this anthropometric indicator. While weekly household food expenditures featured the expected positive relationship, the percentage of calories derived from vegetable sources featured a negative relationship with weight for height z-scores (table. 7-11).

For the multivariate analysis of nutritional intake, the percentages of caloric intake contributed by cereal, animal and vegetable sources were selected as the primary dependent variables. These were chosen because their mutual relationships suggest that they may serve as proxies for nutritional diversity, and because of their association with socio-economic indicators. Energy needs and protein needs ratios were bypassed due to the previously mentioned discrepancy in measures between the three sites which may have been caused by historical variables. The percentage contribution of cereal, animal and vegetable foods to caloric intake were analyzed in a series of stepwise regressions that used the log base 10 of weekly household food expenditures, material style of life index, dependency ratio, adult sex ratio, household size, adult male education, adult female education and research site as independent variables. Below, I summarize the variables that were included in the final model for each of these three regressions by the SPSS stepwise program. Regression coefficients and significance values are presented in table 7-11.

For the percentage of calories obtained from cereals, the stepwise model included material style of life indices, the log base 10 of household food expenditures, household size and adult male education (table 7-12). The analysis demonstrated a moderate relationship between household size and the percentage calories obtained from cereal sources, a weak negative relationship with weekly household food expenditures and adult male education, a moderate negative relationship with material style of life. The regression suggests that as households attain more wealth and as male members attain more education they decrease the amount of calories they obtain from cereal sources. In contrast, larger households rely to a greater extent on cereals for their caloric intake.

Table 7-11. Regression model outcomes for anthropometry z-scores.

<u>Dependent variable</u>	<u>Independent variable</u>	<u>Regression coefficient</u>	<u>Significance</u>	<u>Standard error</u>
HAZ	Percentage calories from vegetables	.176	.026	.06825
	Adult male education	.163	.039	.027
WAZ	MSL	.157	.041	.052
	Dependency Ratio	-.152	.048	.130
WHZ	Household food Expenditures	.180	.053	.479
	Percentage calories From vegetables	-.320	.004	.0898

For the percentage calories obtained from animal sources, the stepwise model included material style of life index, the log base 10 of household food expenditures, household size, and adult male education (table 7-12). The regression model showed a moderate positive relationship between the percentage calories obtained from animal sources and material style of life index. With respect to weekly food expenditures and adult male education, the dependent variable showed a weak positive relationship. In terms of household demography, larger households obtained a lower percentage of their caloric intake from animal sources. The statistical relationships between the percentage of calories obtained from animal sources and the selected independent variables seems to follow a pattern opposite from that of cereals. Small, wealthier households seem to consume more animal foods.

The third regression model under discussion used the percentage calories obtained from vegetable sources as the dependent variable. The final stepwise model included

Table 7-12. Regression model outcomes for sources of caloric intake.

<u>Dependent variable</u>	<u>Independent variable</u>	<u>Regression coefficient</u>	<u>Significance</u>	<u>Standard error</u>
Percentage calories from cereal sources				
	MSL	-.259	.001	.007
	Household size	.321	.000	.004
	Household food expenditures	-.152	.037	.051
	Adult male education	-.135	.088	.003
Percentage calories from animal sources				
	MSL	.270	.001	.004
	Household size	-.225	.047	.029
	Adult male education	.142	.082	.002
Percentage calories from vegetable sources				
	Research site		.000	.001
	MSL	.264	.000	.001
	Household size	-.229	.000	.000
	Household food expenditures	.190	.003	.004

material style of life, household size, research site, and log base 10 of weekly household expenses as the independent variables. The percentage of calories obtained from vegetable sources had a moderate positive relationship with material style of life, and a moderate negative relationship with household size. The log of weekly household food expenditures had a weak positive relationship with the dependent variable, and research site was a significant nominal control variable. Larger households then, seemed to obtain less of their calories from vegetable sources, while wealthier households did the reverse.

Furthermore, being a resident of Cholulteca seemed to be a significant trait in determining dietary vegetable content.

The Mimetic Faculty of Nutrition Statistics

As I read through this summary of statistical outputs I recognize a particular representation of *damnificados* as it materializes in the form of p-values and regression coefficients. This is an image of households that are too large for their own nutritional well-being –note the recurrence of household size as a statistically significant independent variable- and of a limitless potential for the accumulation of wealth that is accompanied by greater nutritional diversity, and implicitly, better anthropometric outcomes- percentage calories from vegetable sources is tentatively linked to anthropometric outcomes and material style of life. Nutritional well-being, in turn, becomes an ultimate, pre-discursive optimal state, prioritized over all other outcomes, who's allegedly unquestionable desirability persuades the reader to accept a normative framework of relationships between variables that purportedly harness, condense, simplify and translate the lives of the people they measure. Most importantly, in the process of conducting this analysis, only a limited number of possibilities are allowed for the articulation of what is real and what is not, a reiterative process that excludes alternative ways of speaking and thinking about the lives of the *damnificados* and the processes and practices that brought about the crisis of Limón de la Cerca.

But are nutrition statistics what Byron Good (1994) calls a “mirror of nature”, a faithful reproduction of a positivist reality, or alternatively, are they a form of mimesis whose intelligibility and function as a discursive reality-making narrative are located in a particular politics and historicity of the body? By mimesis, I mean the process by which

likenesses of the other are constructed and mobilized (see Taussig 1993). In this process of likeness-making, the narrator/modeler both attempts to harness and assume power over the other through representation. Michael Taussig explains the process of likeness-making as the materialization of human realities; a process that involves narration, the semiotics of contact, and the translation and interpretation of features and attributes of the other through the representer's discourse of socio-cultural difference.

In *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993), Taussig reviews ethnographic and historical materials ranging from wood effigies and creation stories used in curing ceremonies by Cuna healers in Panamá, to entries from Charles Darwin's diary as he traveled to Tierra del Fuego in the 19th century. Through these records he makes a convincing argument for the role of language, mimicry and representation in the construction of human realities or documents and artifacts that are said to wield some form of power over such realities. The elements at work in this process include narration, sympathetic contagion, and likeness. Cuna creation stories, for example, rely on narratives that create replicas of human and supernatural realms. As these narrations unfold, human bodies, especially those of women, are used as metaphorical and literal locations of creation, and their detailed description, as things of both the immediate world of human interaction and the world of spirits, powers and medicinal substances, has the effect of multiplying the levels of mimicry around which creation stories are told so that the supernatural world imitates the human world and vice versa. In this manner, language makes reality.

Taussig is not alone in his interpretation of the language-reality interface. In a similar way, Byron Good (1994) has carefully analyzed the narratives of medical students at Harvard Medical School as they progress through their programs of study, and, in the

process, transform the symbolic structures through which they interpret their worlds and create their realities. Good's detailed transcriptions and phenomenological analysis have substantiated his controversial hypothesis that medicine constructs its objects of study, and it is in this constructivism, and not some exclusive access to a universal nature, that its claims to efficacy lie. Good's transcriptions emphasize a common theme among medical students: that medical school transforms the way they see and act upon the world and people.

Through their participation in anatomy lectures, for example, students learn to view the body in a way different from that learned through their experiences in the non-medical world. The dissection of cadavers teaches students to visualize the body and its organs through mechanisms that cut across the boundaries and divisions that they have become accustomed to in their experiences outside medical school. Bodies are cut into sections, crania are separated from torsos, limbs are examined individually, flesh is removed as if it were a simple covering to reveal a world of muscles and connective tissues. According to the medical students interviewed by Good, this process transforms the way they look at people in the way they conceptualize and act towards bodies and the way they think about pathology.

As their means of visual perception are transformed and medical students are taught new ways of compartmentalizing the body, of making distinctions between tissues and the ways in which anomalies are identified, they also transform the way they speak about and represent the patients they assist and the ailments they cure. In this process, they also internalize a different relationship between language, perception and the making of the real. One of the primary ways in which medical students are trained and evaluated

during their first years of clinical experience is through the practice of patient presentations during clinical rounds. Patient presentations are a summary of a patient's illness, illness history, prognosis and recommendations for treatment. Medical students are assigned to patients who they interview and examine. In the process of these interviews, patients offer narratives that intertwine life and illness histories with their own discursive symbolic structures whose semiotics explain, sometimes in a way foreign to that of the medical student, how the disease is materialized in the patient's episteme. The medical student is then charged with the task of translating the narratives of the patient into a system of signs and semiotics that are intelligible to the biomedical professional. The medical student, however, does not interpret this encounter as an act of translation from one episteme to another, but as a search for truths about the body that lie hidden beneath health beliefs, and a discovery of physiological signs, objects of knowledge specific to western medicine that she has been carefully trained to identify in countless hours of anatomy laboratories. Once again, as in the reconstruction encounter, knowledge systems become hierarchized, and a clinical encounter becomes a nexus where force relations and power structures are articulated. It is for this reason that Good writes that the analysis of healing systems and illness experiences can help us understand the ways in which worlds are constructed through language and epistemes, a process that, in turn, reveals "the practices that encode structures of social relations and power" (Good 1994:134).

As for the two other elements used in reality-making, likeness and contact are pervasive not only in the religious rituals and practices of South American indigenous groups, but also ethnographic knowledge-making. The idea that fashioning an object in

the likeness of an entity that one wishes to wield some power over or whose power one wishes to harness was pervasive among the Cuna in the early 20th century. Effigies of powerful foreigners or of sea turtles used for curing or for hunting, one to wield the power of the other and one to summon a desired prey, were crafted in a minimalist likeness, that is, not necessarily adhering to the western cannon of realism, but with the mimicry of essential features sufficient to convey the message of representation. Contact, on the other hand, whether it be through the contact of light with the human eye and photographic film, producing an image of that which is to be represented, or the procuring of hair or any other bodily products as part of magical ritual, is repeatedly used in the ethnographic record to convey the notion of replication and of control of that replica, and, by extension, the original. What is most interesting is that both colonial ethnographer and colonial subject use the notion of contact and contagion in their acts of representation and their attempts to harness the power of the other, hence the importance of ethnography in anthropological epistemology.

What I would like to propose here is that nutrition statistics, as an institutional narrative, share many key elements of the mimetic faculty with Cuna creation myths or the presentation of a patient during clinical rounds at Harvard's Medical School. This is not so much to claim that there is a set universal pattern through which all humans fashion representations, but to bring into question the hierarchies of knowledge that this dissertation has set out to problematize. I want to do this by pointing out important similarities where some would claim empirical difference, an act that will help dismiss the dichotomy between folk belief and scientific knowledge.

As a nutritional anthropologist, for example, I used the semiotics of contact- the touching of children's bodies with anthropometric instruments- and phenomenology- my presence in the reconstruction zone as a participant observer- to claim empirical validity, allegedly making my process of likeness-making if not a more objective science, at least a holistic understanding, and not a mystical process of mimicry similar to that of Taussig's Cuna healers. In the end, I too, have constructed a likeness. While a Cuna healer would use a particular type of wood, I have used computer programs to model the people of Limón de la Cerca into reality, and in the process have attempted to harness power over representation and usurped the authoritarian position that allows me to speak for the *damnificados*.

A common critique of a commentary such as this is that, in the process of interpretive analysis, the *post* anthropologist loses his bearings, acts and thinks as if nothing existed, and, in the end, says nothing of consequence. This critique, however, is only possible if one assumes that the goal of ethnography is to produce a veridical representation. Such is not the goal of this ethnography. My point is that I am not concerned with the production of mirror images; instead, I am interested in the transformation of ethnography into a space where we may examine the politics of knowledge-making as an element of power relations, and to underscore that it was in midst of these same politics of knowledge-making that the epicenter of the crisis witnessed in Limón de la Cerca is located.

Finally, I would like to add that I do not invoke mimesis in a derogatory sense. Those that view it as such do so because of the challenges it makes to their truth claims. I also do not suggest that we abandon nutritional epidemiology as a practice, and substitute

it with a narrative system of knowledge-making. As Allan Young (1995) has demonstrated, narrative and statistical systems of knowledge may very well operate on similar positivist assumptions. Furthermore, to think that one system of knowledge-making is better suited as a means of accessing the world assumes a type of Levi-Struassian relativism that permits for the possibility of a new epistemic hierarchy. Alternatively, what is important is to recognize the practices and discourses through which epistemes materialize realities, the problematic and hierarchical implications of claims to objectivity, the politics of knowledge that require the exclusion of a constitutive outside to fashion the subject/objects of an episteme and the relevance of understanding what these exclusions are if we are truly committed to the process of disaster mitigation.

Performativity in Nutritional Epidemiology

Fitting numbers to the world changes the world- or at least the concepts we use to catch hold of the world. A world of continuous spanning rest and motion, certainty and ignorance does not look like a world of sharp either/or oppositions. (Daston 1988:5)

In her book *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (1988), Lorraine Daston proposes a critical approach to statistical analyses that resonates many of the issues concerning the discursive creation of objects of knowledge that I have just discussed. According to Daston, there is a process of translation involved in the making of the fundamental variables of statistical analysis that is part of a performative discursive deployment. This deployment, in turn, fashions a world composed of objects that, rather than being a positivist reality, are a representation characterized by a particular history and politics. This is a process that features the reiteration of subject categories like the household, the focal child, the primary care taker and the male head of household. It is through this process of methodological repetition, of citationality, that these categories

become real (Butler 1993). This translation/deployment involves the act of mimetic resemblance-making, where the category is fashioned through a vague likeness that is executed on the basis of discursive aesthetics, and is not necessarily an exact image.

This translation decides, *a priori*, what the defining traits of subjects will be, and, by extension, what their ontologies are. Through it, only a particular roster of traits come to count as *the real*, while different ontologies and subjectivities are discarded as unspeakable and unlivable. For example, a household in the preceding analysis was defined by the number of its members, the number of dependents, its fertility, its number of possessions. But Foucault (1975, 1970), has demonstrated that these subjects have a history, that there has been a particular politics of knowledge – surveillance and biopower – that has fashioned these traits as those through which the world is to be known, making them discursive elements that produce a certain type of reality and a certain structure of power relations, rather than a mirror of a prediscursive world as it is. Simultaneously, we must ask what is excluded from this demographic definition of the household. What meanings, social arrangements and kinship relations slip through the categorical fingers of this analytical framework, and what information could they give us about the realities of Limón de la Cerca residents?

So this brings us back to the results of my statistical analysis. What are we to say in the end, about the nutritional status of the residents of Limón de la Cerca, and, by extension, about the processes by which the crisis that was perceived through the narratives of nutritional anthropologists, agency workers and disaster survivors? What I have attempted to demonstrate is that nutrition statistics materialize a reality that places disaster survivors under scrutiny and blames their pre-modern reproductive patterns, their

lack of education and the demography of their households for the disaster that has concerned this ethnography. These results, I argue, are a function of the performativity of nutrition statistics, which are, in turn, yet another discourse that makes knowledge about the objects it creates.

Conclusion

To return to the question that opened this chapter, I would like to call attention for one last time to table 1.1 and ask what relation, as an epistemic product, does it have to the narratives of *damnificados* and the opinions of experts who recognized Limón de la Cerca as a mitigation failure on the one hand, and produced institutional reports hailing it as a triumph of reconstruction on the other. The question I would like to consider as a means of closing this study is: what contribution to the discussion of relativism, performativity, social constructivism and positivism does this particular case study make?

This ethnography has been driven by a dialogue between a number of epistemes used by a variety of actors in disaster reconstruction. As I explained earlier, one of the concerns that drove the writing of this dissertation was the fact that an anthropometric study and the narratives of disaster survivors both suggested that Limón de la Cerca was a locality under conditions of crisis from 1999 to 2001. Throughout the writing of this ethnography it was my opinion that the implications of the confluence of these two epistemes for social science theory deserved closer inspection. Is this epistemic confluence indicative of the existence of a prediscursive reality that both knowledge-making systems were detecting and interpreting? Or is it suggestive of a prediscursive reality that scientific methodologies like nutritional epidemiology as a knowledge-

making practice are better suited to understand? Or what about the reverse, are narratives a better means of understanding the reconstruction encounter?

I see the answer to these queries embedded in the first question in this line of inquiry. I interpret the mutual recognition of a crisis as a confluence and not a process of mutual gazing and interpreting of an object. These questions reify, once more, a difference between narrative and scientific knowledge that I have tried to overcome throughout this chapter. If we approach statistical analyses and the stories of *damnificados* simply as different narrative styles, then these systems of knowledge become accessible to us as resources for the exploration of ontological differences and performative/mimetic systems of reality making. Let us not forget that the denial of the existence of these differences was the epicenter of the crisis that has concerned us for so long .

Although there is a confluence of narratives, each narrative style materializes different objects with dramatically different ontologies. The narratives are also defined by particular semiotic and chronological structures that, in turn, tell different stories about this locality. What I hope to have demonstrated is that mitigation cannot be thought of as a singular reality that is approached or evaluated on the basis of a singular set of epistemic criteria. The possibility of the existence of multiple ontologies and the ways in which reality is made through reiterative practices and performative acts must be taken into consideration in disaster reconstruction if we are to make mitigation a multiple reality.

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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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